MARJORY'S HOUSE PARTY

THE

MARJORY-JOE SERIES

BY

ALICE E. ALLEN

Marjory, the Circus Girl . .	$1.50
Marjory at the Willows . .	1.50
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Joe, the Circus Boy—Rosemary	1.65
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"MARJORY STOOD ALL ALONE IN THE BIG FIELD."
(See page 44)

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ALICE E. ALLEN

Author of

"Marjory, the Circus Girl," "Marjory at the Willows,"
"Joe, the Circus Boy—Rosemary," "The Martie Twins," etc.

ILLUSTRATED

By

ELIZABETH R. WITHINGTON

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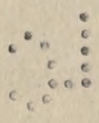

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Marjory's House Party

CHAPTER I

THE LOOKING-GLASS DOG

"I JUST can't wait to get there," cried Marjory. She hopped along through the great city station so fast that her golden curls under her dark fur cap hopped too. "Can you?"

"I don't know," said Lissy, her cheeks blazing with hurry and excitement. "I'm just wild to get there and see them all, and I just can't bear to get there and have the journey all over with."

"You're so funny, Lissy," said Roger.

Many people turned to look and smile at the happy little group. It was so Christ-

masy, somehow, each of its members wearing a bit of holly. There was a big jolly man, who was Marjory's adopted father, Mr. Brook. The little girl, on one side of him, was Marjory Brook herself. The taller one, on the other side, was Marjory's sister, Lissy Penny. The pale-faced boy, with dark glasses, was Roger Kent.

It was the day after Christmas. The station was like a child all tired out with its Christmasing, but still holding fast to its beloved gifts. There were packages everywhere—in people's arms, on the seats, even in great piles on the floor. At every breath of wind from opening doors red and green papers flew up and scurried madly about. Sprays of fading holly, bits of evergreen, tangled tinsel-cords, and long ends of ribbon showed in most unexpected places. A candy-box, spilling out sweets, lay discon-

solately on a seat, waiting for some one to come back for it. A tiny stocking lay forgotten on the floor. Hung on the arm of a seat was a broken candy-cane.

"What I can't see," said Marjory, as the children found seats, and Mr. Brook went to the ticket-office, "is why Joe and Betty and the others aren't going. Mr. Blake sounded so mysterious."

"Something very unexpected happened at the very last minute, I suppose," said Lissy.

"Well, I'm glad something didn't happen at any minute to keep us from going," cried Marjory. "I couldn't have stood it, could you?"

"Maybe we could," said Roger gravely. "But I'm glad we didn't have to, Mar."

"Here's Daddy with our tickets," cried Marjory. She ran to meet her father and hurried him back to the others. "You're

going to carry them, Roger, because you're the man of the party. Hurry, Lissy."

"Your train doesn't leave for twenty minutes," laughed her father.

"Never mind," said Marjory, still clinging to her father, and now hurrying him along toward the great train-shed. "Everyone hurries in this station. We'll just have to keep up."

They hurried. They went out of the tired-looking station into the dark train-yard, where trains could be heard whistling, letting off steam, and doing all sorts of strange things. Long lines of people waited for gates to open. Their gate was up, and a man stood there, calling off the names of the stations at which the train would stop. When Marjory heard "Ridgewood," echoing through the train-shed, she hurried her father faster than ever.

"It sounds so good," she cried. "Only, Daddy, I do wish you were going, too."

They went along the side of a train of day-coaches till they came at last to the chair-car. Here, the porter helped them aboard, found chairs for them, and took care of their baggage. Daddy told this same porter all about them, and where they were to get off. He slipped something into the big hand which brought a broad grin to the black face.

"Yes suh, yes suh!" he said several times.

Then Daddy kissed Marjory twice and Lissy twice and shook hands with Roger, just as if he was quite grown up, and told him to look carefully after the ladies. Marjory went all the way with Daddy to the door. When at last she came back, her face was a little sober, as it always was when she left Daddy. But it brightened quickly,

as they arranged their seats. Roger wanted to sit in the middle one of the three chairs.

"Then I can look after you both," he explained.

On each side of them, trains whistled and shrieked. Clouds of steam whitened the windows. After what seemed a long while to the eager little travelers, their train made up its mind to start.

It said several shrill good-bys to the other trains. Outside, trainmen called, "All aboard!" inside, porters called again the names of stations. Chairs filled up. Breathless people hurried in.

There was great bustle. Doors banged. There were more shouts, strange grindings and clankings, important whistles, furious blasts of steam. By and by, there came a slow, easy, gliding movement.

This time, it was really their own train, not the one next to it, that went out of the train-shed.

Lissy, feeling very important, sank back in her chair. She found herself staring straight into a great plate-glass mirror at the end of the car. And in that mirror she saw a sudden vision of a dog with a funny face, half brown, half white. He showed for a half-minute in the looking-glass, then he was gone. Then he showed for an even briefer time, as if he pulled frantically at a lead. Then he disappeared, and didn't come back.

"Fritz," cried Lissy. She flew round in her seat. The train slid into the long tunnel. Lissy grabbed and caught Roger's head.

"Fritz?" he cried pulling away.

"Fritz?" cried Marjory at the same

minute somewhere in the dark back of Roger. "Where, Lissy?"

"Just you wait till we get out of this tunnel," said Lissy, much excited. "You'll see!"

The long tunnel had never seemed so long. Every time an opening let in a little light, the three little folks bobbed up, and every time the light went, they bobbed down, for all the world like three jumping-jacks.

When at last the coach swung out into broad daylight again, all three were kneeling in their chairs facing toward the back of the car. But all there was to see was the line of red plush chairs, each holding a man, woman, or child. There was no dog anywhere.

"I saw him just as plain in that looking-glass," said Lissy, "tugging and pulling as hard as he could."

"Who was with him?" said Marjory.

"Somebody's back," said Lissy. "It could have been Joe's or most anybody's. I couldn't see anything plainly but the dog."

"It couldn't have been Fritz," said Roger. "It just looked like him."

"You were thinking of him," said Marjory, "and just thought you saw him. I often do that."

"I saw a dog," said Lissy positively. "All brown and white and jumpy like Fritz."

"It couldn't have been," said Roger, in his funny decided little way.

Lissy was so sure that when the porter came along she asked him if there wasn't a big brown and white terrier on the train.

"We don't carry dogs," he said grinning.

"So, you see, Lissy," said Marjory.

Lissy set her lips tight together. She didn't say any more. But it was easy to see she wasn't one bit convinced. Every time the door back of them opened, she turned around to see if, maybe, Fritz wasn't coming in. Between times she kept her eyes fixed on the mirror.

By and by the mirror began to give back to her such charming bits of sky and mountains that she turned to the window to see for herself just what was outside. And there was the blue river and the high snow-topped mountains.

"Don't the mountains look just like old friends?" said Marjory.

"Remember the day we quarreled about the Hudson and the St. Lawrence, Mar?" said Roger.

"Wasn't it hot?" cried Marjory. "And wasn't that an awful storm? And then we

got lost, and Granny and Lissy came with the pony and found us."

When Marjory Brook and Lissy Penny and Roger Kent began remembering the good times they'd had, the summer before, at The Willows where the two little girls' grandmothers lived, it took some time. Marjory had gone first, all by herself, not knowing the Grandmothers at all, to visit them. She had found Roger at the big summer hotel, having a dismal time because his eyes were giving out and there wasn't much he could do without pain. Then Lissy had come.

And they had met all over again their old friends, Joel Bernard, Betty Blake, Nancy Spindle, the Martie Twins, and the runaway dog, Fritz, touring through the mountains with Uncle Ben Baker.

In the midst of the good times the great

war had broken out in Europe. Roger's cousin, Dick Carr, his only relative and guardian, was a Canadian. So he had sailed overseas. Marjory's father had taken Roger into his own home in the city. He was having his eyes treated by a great specialist, who promised the boy they would be quite well again if he could be patient long enough.

Lissy, whose own home was the Penny Bank, a great rambling country-house, was spending the winter with her brother John Penny and his wife Doris, and going to school with Marjory. And now, the three were on their way to spend the rest of their holiday vacation with the grandmothers at The Willows.

While all these things were being talked over, the long train kept on its way through the bright, beautiful river valley.

Tiny villages it passed with just a wave of smoke. At some of the towns, it stopped to say, "How do you do?" At the great cities, it staid long enough for a little friendly conversation.

Villages, towns, cities— the train knew them all well. For up and down, up and down the broad, bright valley it went, always fluttering its pretty smoke wreaths, always sending out its shrill challenging whistles.

By and by, the porter came and took them all into the big diner for dinner. And when they came back to their seats, they all set up a cry of delight. For outside, the landscape, that had been so dull and brown, was soft pure white. And more snow came all the time.

"Oh dear," said Marjory softly. "How I'm ever going to get this lovely soft snow

and the clouds and the woods and everything into my book, I don't see."

Lissy and Roger knew all about the book Marjory was going to write, just as soon as Roger's eyes would let him make pictures for it.

"Have you decided yet, Margie, just what it's going to be about?" asked Lissy anxiously. Marjory hadn't been able, a few days before, to make up her mind whether to write a fairy story or a love story.

"I think now," said Marjory slowly, "it will be about Fritz."

"Oh splendid!" cried Lissy. She gave a quick half-glance toward that mirror where she still felt sure Fritz ought to be.

"I'll begin it," said Marjory, "with his coming into the circus and finding Joe there, and Joe's running away from the

circus and getting acquainted with Betty, and Fritz's coming back to them."

"Then you must tell about how he helped Joe and Nancy Spindle find Martin that summer he was lost," said Lissy. "I always liked that."

"Be sure and put in about the summer you lived at Overbrook, Mar, so near Lissy, and you didn't know you were sisters, and how you stayed awhile with those gypsies," said Roger.

"It's going to be a splendid book," cried Lissy.

"But isn't it too bad," said Marjory," that we can't know just what Fritz did when he was a puppy before he got into that circus?"

"Couldn't you make up that part, Margie?" said Lissy.

"People do make up the things they put

in books, you know. Doris knows a woman who writes lovely grown-up stories. She comes to the house and reads them aloud to Doris. And you'd think everything in them really happened. But they're made up—she said so, herself—right out of her own head."

"Of course, I could do that," said Marjory doubtfully. "But it would be ever so much nicer if I could find out what he really and truly did."

"How could you?" cried Lissy.

"I couldn't," said Marjory. "Joe says he's tried and Betty's tried and Nancy Spindle and the Marties and Uncle Ben. Why Uncle Ben even wrote letters to some of those old circus people to see if they knew. But his letters all came back to him. No one knows where Fritz was before he came into the circus—why Lissy

Penny, isn't that the Ridgewood bridge?"

At that very moment, the porter spoke to them from the aisle.

"Here's where you-all gets off," he said. "Plenty of time, plenty of time," he added, as three little folks all reached for their wraps and tried to get into them at once.

There was just time enough for every one to find which particular coat and bag and umbrella belonged to him. Then the train stopped. The porter helped them down the steps, and there was Wesley, Grandma Beach's man, smiling at them.

"I came for you," he began, when he was interrupted by a sharp little neigh and a brisk little "Whoa!" And next minute, from somewhere there came a little girl with cheeks as red as her coat and hood and mittens.

"We almost didn't get here," she called.

"But we did—so never mind."

"Why, it's Susy," cried Marjory. "Susy, here are Lissy Penny and Roger Kent. They know Molly if they don't know you—did you bring Molly?"

"Molly brought me," laughed Susy. "She's right over there. We had to stop to tell the Grandmas we were coming for you. Wesley had started, but they said never mind, he could bring home the luggage. There's room for us all in my little new Christmas cutter that your Grandmas gave me if we sit tight. It's red—see—'cause Molly and I both like red best. Isn't it dear? And see the blankets? It's just about the loveliest Christmas present I ever had. Get in, now—Wesley boost."

Wesley boosted. He packed them in and tucked them up in the warm new Christmas robes. Every one's cap was

pulled down and collar turned up, and mittens put on. Lissy was on one side, Roger on the other. Marjory sat in the middle, holding Susy, and peering out one side or the other every minute to see if everything in Ridgewood looked just as it had last summer. Susy drove Molly. Molly turned around and looked them all over in the friendliest fashion. She had known them all well the summer before, for Marjory had kept her while Susy went on a long visit to California. When Molly was sure every one was quite ready, she started out briskly, her little new bells jing-jingling.

"Isn't it Christmasy?" began Marjory.

"Hark a minute, please," cried Lissy grabbing Susy. "I thought I heard Fritz bark."

"It couldn't be Fritz, Lissy," said Roger. "It was just some other dog."

"It sounded like Fritz," said Lissy. "And he doesn't sound like any other dog."

CHAPTER II

JINGLE, BELLS

"WHY, it's all ice," cried Marjory, when the jingle bells brought them in sight of the river between the trees.

"What else could it be?" laughed Susy.

"The boys say it's grand skating. But mother won't let me skate on the river. She thinks it's too dangerous. I skate on our pond, though, and I can ski and snowshoe."

"I can ski," said Roger.

"I can't even snowshoe," said Marjory. "Oh, what lots and lots of snow—much more than at Overbrook, Lissy."

"Jingle, jingle, jingle," said Molly's bells

as they sped along the smooth white road. "Jingle, jingle, jingle!" just as if they knew it was the Christmas season. And by and by, Marjory, peeping eagerly around Susy's back, saw a long white bridge, a broad white yard, bare willows with branches black against a flaming sunset sky, and there was the House of the Grandmothers, with lighted windows and an opening door. Celia, Grandma Beach, Great-Aunt Eunice, and little Great-Granny were all in the doorway, smiling and excited. Molly jingled up to the steps, and, next minute, every one tumbled out of the cutter, talking, laughing, getting out of wraps, and flocking into the warm bright dining-room.

Molly wouldn't take a step toward the barn. She just stood outside and called for her sugar-lumps. And Celia ran out with some, so excited over the arrival of the

children that she took the best egg-shell china bowl with her—the one that had been in the family longer even than little Granny.

"We must hurry right along," said Susy. "It's getting dark."

"You are to make us a little visit, Susan," said Grandma Beach in her stateliest manner. "I have telephoned your mother, and you and Molly are to spend Sunday with us. I know my little grand-daughters and Roger want to see you."

"Isn't your Grandma Beach just lovely?" whispered Susy to Lissy. "I'd be almost afraid to be her grand-daughter, but I love to look at her."

"So do I," said Lissy, smiling at her tall handsome grandmother. "And I'm not a bit afraid of her, now that I know her," she added.

Such a supper party as that was in the

firelit, lamplit dining-room. All the old-fashioned china was out to hold the good things Celia had made.

Almost everything that Lissy liked best, and Marjory liked best, and Roger liked best, was there. It wasn't much like the first dull quiet meals Marjory had known in that house. The children laughed and talked as much as they wanted to. Although she couldn't hear a word, Aunt Eunice nodded and beamed at them. Granny chuckled and patted Marjory's hand, and seemed the youngest and gayest of any one. And Grandma Beach poured the cocoa and tea, and smiled her best story-book smile.

After supper, Granny ran to the doors of the living-room, which all this time had been closed. With Celia's help, she flung them wide open.

And there beside the open fire, which roared its jolly welcome, was a tall Christmas Tree, trimmed with cones and popcorn, and sparkling with tiny colored tapers.

The fruits of the Tree, of course, were gifts. Susy's had been the little red cutter. It had been given to her early, so that they might all have the fun of riding in it. And there were snowshoes for Marjory, Lissy, and Roger. Aunt Eunice's skillful fingers had been busy. She had made wonderful strings of beads for the little girls—Marjory's yellow, Lissy's blue, and Susy's red. She had knit a fine warm muffler for Roger in the khaki-color he liked. Marjory and Lissy and Roger all had gifts for the Grandmothers, too, and for Celia and Wesley and Susy and Molly. And all these had to be brought in, undone, and exclaimed over.

"Isn't Christmas too lovely?" cried Susy. She was strutting about like some Indian Princess, everybody's beads wound round and round her bobbed black hair. "And some day while you're here, you're coming up to my house. Our house isn't old-fashioned and fine and full of wonderful things like this one, of course, but there are my sister Jeanne, brother Phil, and the baby. And it's lots of fun."

"It sounds like the Penny Bank," said Lissy. "That's my very own home, you know. It's always been brimful of children. We all went there for Christmas Eve and had a Tree for my little stepbrothers and sister. Then, last night, we had a wonderful one at Marjory's home in the city. And to-night we have this one."

"This is all Granny's plan," said Celia. "There hasn't been a Tree in this house

before, since your mother left it, Miss Lissy."

"Time there was, time there was," cried Granny, unexpectedly hearing as was her way. "When grandchildren and Christmas come together, there's bound to be a Tree. Margaret likes it, herself." She nodded her pretty silvery head at Grandma Beach.

Grandma Beach did seem to be having a good time in her own quiet way. Lissy's father had sent her a beautiful purple sweater which she was already wearing.

"I can't think of a Christmas without a Tree or two," said Marjory.

"I can," said Lissy. "I can remember several when we had only a row of stockings—and not much in them either. But we had good times just the same. That was before I knew you, Margie," she added.

Just here, Grandma Beach happened to glance at the clock.

"It's bedtime for young people," she said.

A little bed had been set up in Marjory's room so that the three little girls could sleep together. It was such fun. Celia had to come in two or three times to tell them they must stop talking and go to sleep or they'd never be ready for all the good times to come.

The next day was a beautifully blue and white Sunday, sparkling with sunbeams and Christmas cheer. In the morning, every one but Celia and Granny went to church. It was a tiny little church standing all by itself in a great grove of evergreen trees. And it was so full of Christmas greens that it seemed like going to church in the winter woods, Lissy said.

On the way home Roger and Marjory

"MARJORY SLIPPED HER HAND INTO GRANDMA'S MUFF."

walked one on each side of Grandma Beach. Lissy and Susie came behind with Aunt Eunice. Marjory slipped her hand into Grandma's muff and found Grandma's hand waiting there for her just like a story-book grandmother's. It gave her courage to ask the things they'd all been wanting to ask ever since they had come to The Willows.

"Grandma Beach," she said, "while we're here, can't we, please, go up to Good Times Camp?"

Roger and Lissy and Susy all held their breaths for Grandma's answer. But all she said was:

"Good Times Camp? Why my *dear,* in the middle of the winter?"

And put that way, it did seem an impossible thing to do. Good Times Camp was a little shooting-lodge 'way up on the

mountain. It belonged to a big club in New York of which Marjory's father was a member. Roger and Marjory had found it the summer before, and had set up housekeeping there. When Lissy had come, she had loved it almost as much as they did.

All their things had been left there in the fall.

"It does seem as if we must go there now we're so near," said Lissy when they had reached home and Grandma Beach had gone to see Celia about dinner.

"I don't see why we can't go," said Roger disgustedly. "The snow can't be very deep."

"Daddy said we might ask Grandma Beach. But we must do just whatever she said," said Marjory. "So of course we can't go. But I am dreadfully disappointed —and Susy's never even seen it."

After dinner, all the little folks went out into the big yard to try their new snowshoes. Susy and Roger and Lissy all knew how to use them. And Marjory soon learned. When they went back into the house, there was Granny in her soft black silk gown, with a sparkling comb in her pretty hair, and sparkles to match in her lovely old eyes.

"You're all invited upstairs to my room," she said.

It was the first time Susy had ever been in Granny's quaint, old-fashioned attic room. The others could scarcely wait to see it again. When they were all inside and the door closed, Lissy drew a deep breath.

"It's just exactly the same," she said softly. "I was so afraid it would look different somehow. It does seem," she added, "as

if you stepped back a hundred years when you come in here and shut the door."

Granny bustled about, as pleased and excited as a child.

"This is to be a fancy-dress party," she said. "Each find a costume."

"Where?" asked Susy, looking anxiously at her middy and skirt.

"Just wait till you see the inside of Granny's trunks," whispered Marjory. "They are stuffed full of costumes."

Sure enough they were—the trouble was there were too many to choose from. But after many giggles and whispers behind the screens, a gorgeous little procession came out and marched to Granny to shake hands in the quaint formal way she remembered and loved.

"I started in to be Martha Washington," said Susy, as she dropped her courtesy.

"But there were so many pretty things—I don't look much like her, do I?"

Susy was a funny little figure. She wore a stiff brocaded brown silk dress that would stand without her inside it at all. It had a great deal too much skirt and not anywhere near enough waist. Over it, she wore a wonderful wrap which Granny called a pelisse. It was lined elegantly with claret colored satin. She had added enough jewelry for a Spanish dancer, and at the last minute, she had found a scarlet silk sash with long fringe which she had tied about her head.

"I don't know just who I am either," said Roger anxiously. "But isn't it a fine costume, Granny?"

Roger really looked well in his long cape with its scarlet lining turned out, his jaunty

felt hat, with its drooping scarlet feather, and his sword.

"The sword was your great-grandfather's, Margie," said Granny, touching it lovingly. "It was in the Revolutionary War."

"Mistress Betsy Ross," said the next little figure demurely.

It was Lissy transformed into the dearest little Quaker lady.

Her gown was soft shimmering silk of dull blue-gray. Her dark hair was parted primly under its lace cap. She wore a lace kerchief. And her bonnet was a real Quaker bonnet.

"It's very becoming to you, Lissy," cried Granny, her old eyes twinkling.

"I feel as if I could make a Flag this very minute," said Lissy. "But isn't Marjory too sweet for anything?" she added in a whisper as Marjory came forward.

"Mistress Dolly Madison," she said with her daintiest courtesy.

Marjory had found her costume folded away by itself in a white box that smelled faintly of faded roses. Her dress was soft rosy silk with low neck and puffs for sleeves. Over it was a lovely shawl with long fringe. On her head was a great white straw bonnet with rose-colored facing and long ostrich feathers to match. One golden curl lay over her shoulder. She carried a great rosy feather fan.

"Oh Granny," she cried. "Isn't this the dearest costume? Whose was it?"

"I wore it once, child," said Granny. She fingered the soft old silk fondly. "It was at a fancy-dress affair, and I met your great-grandfather. Only he wasn't a grandfather then, just a tall big boy with handsome dark eyes. And he said, 'May I have

this dance, Mistress Margaret?' And I said, 'You may, with pleasure.' "

When Granny spoke for great-grandfather, she laid her bit of a hand on her heart and bowed low. And when she replied for herself, she caught up her skirts and dropped a little courtesy. The children were all so delighted that they sat right down on the floor, took off their hats and bonnets, and demanded stories of the long-ago days Granny loved so well. She told them all about that fancy-dress ball and others that followed. She told them of how she and grandfather had gone to housekeeping all by themselves with not much money and of what good times they'd had.

She told them of old war days and peace days.

They were quite surprised to come out of story land and find the old attic room quite

dark with some of the first stars of the winter twilight looking down at them through the windows. Roger ran to get wood for the fire which was dying down. And just then, Grandma Beach and Aunt Eunice came in. Behind them was Celia to light the tall old candles Granny loved. In the firelight and candle-light, she served tea. Only the tea was cocoa. It was served in wonderful lavender and white china which Granny kept upstairs in her own cupboard. And the little cakes and caraway cookies that went with the cocoa were made from recipes in Granny's little old yellowed cook-book she'd used when she married the tall big boy with handsome dark eyes and went to housekeeping in the little four-roomed house.

By and by, they all went down stairs, still in their fancy-dress, to light the big

Christmas Tree again. Susy was called to the telephone. When she came back she was greatly excited.

"It's mother," she said. "And she wants you all to come to my house to-morrow. I can bring you back to-morrow night," she says. "Oh Mrs. Beach," she added. "Mother said to ask you first if they could go, and I forgot all about it. But you will say yes, won't you please?"

"If it's a good day," said Grandma Beach, smiling at Susy's red face. "I'm sure they would greatly enjoy it. I'll speak to your mother myself, Susy."

The rest of the evening was given up to plans for the next day.

Susy lived up on one of the hills not far from The Willows. Marjory had been there once, and she had much to tell about that day—the day she had discovered Susy

and Molly. It was decided that two should ride in the red cutter and two should walk on snowshoes, changing about half way.

Somewhere in the middle of the night, or so it seemed to Marjory and Lissy, Susy's voice said, "It must be almost time to start."

And although it was still dark, it was morning. And because they wanted a long day, they all got up and ate breakfast by lamplight.

Just as Wesley drove Molly up to the door, the sun came up, bringing a wonderful winter day with him.

Roger and Marjory climbed into the cutter. Roger drove. Lissy and Susy strapped on their snowshoes. It wasn't very cold. And the roadside was crisp and crusty, so that snowshoeing was fun. But of course, the two on snowshoes couldn't

quite keep up to Molly, who scampered along, her bells jingling merrily.

Where the road that went up the hill to Susy's house left the main road, Lissy and Susy found the others waiting for them. Molly was pawing the snow impatiently with one pretty little forefoot. Marjory was crying "Whoa!" And Roger was holding fast to the reins.

"We want to snowshoe the rest of the way," said Marjory.

So Roger and Marjory scrambled out of the cutter and Lissy and Susy scrambled in. Even while Roger and Marjory tugged at the straps of their snowshoes, the red cutter disappeared around a bend in the road.

"Go across lots," was the last they heard, Susy waving her hand toward a place where some lowered bars showed the way into the fields.

"And follow the snowshoe tracks."

CHAPTER III

SUSY'S FAMILY

"SAY, Mar," said Roger, as he helped Marjory with a stiff strap. "Do you know where that road goes to?"

He pointed to the road which wound past the big hotel.

"I've been thinking of it," said Marjory. She looked wistfully along the snowy road under the great green pines. A short distance above the hotel, another little-used road led from it to Good Times Camp.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't go," said Roger. "It's safe enough. It's just that your Grandma Beach has taken it into her head she doesn't want us to."

"That road is safe enough," said Marjory.

"But when the road up the mountain isn't traveled, that's bad. Wesley said so."

"There's fine crust," said Roger. "We could go to the Camp and look things over and get back to Susy's before dinner."

"But it wouldn't be right," said Marjory slowly.

"What harm will it do?" asked Roger.

Marjory shook her head.

"I don't quite see why we can't go all right, Roddy," she said. "But Daddy said not to unless Grandma Beach was willing. So we can't."

"Grandma Beach is never willing," said Roger obstinately.

"Oh yes, she is, now," said Marjory. "She isn't like she used to be. Do come on, Roddy. We must hurry. The girls will be at Susy's long before we are."

"Who cares about Susy's?" said Roger.

"It's no fun going there. Good Times Camp is lots better."

"I want to go dreadfully, Roddy," said Marjory. "But we can't. So that's all there is to it."

"You mean you can't," said Roger. "I'm old enough to decide such a thing for myself. And I'm going."

Without once looking back, Roger set off swiftly, his snowshoes squeaking defiantly back at Marjory.

"Please don't go, Roger," called Marjory. "Something might happen to you, all alone."

The minute Marjory said that she knew it was the very worst thing she could have said. Roger was sensitive about his eyes. He never wanted any one to say anything about them. Now, his back stiffened and he went faster than ever.

"Oh dear," said Marjory. "He looks just as he used to when I first knew him."

She went slowly across the road, through the gap in the fence, and began to follow the long line of snowshoes tracks across the shining white fields. Every step or two, she stopped and looked back for Roger.

There was no Roger in sight now anywhere.

"I just can't let him go off like that," she thought. "Daddy says he must never go out alone—something might happen to him. And this snow is so blinding—it must hurt his eyes even with dark glasses on. Oh dear, what shall I do? He hasn't had such a spell in ever and ever so long."

Like some queer, broad-footed little bird, Marjory stood all alone in the big field. A saucy little chickadee came to look at her for a minute or two. Then he hurried

away to tell some of his chums about her.

She was thinking of the strange life Roger had had—handed about from one relative to another.

And the trouble with his eyes, too. "It was a wonder he did as well as he did," Daddy said. "They must be patient with him."

Marjory took a few steps back—that didn't seem right. Then she took a few steps forward—that didn't seem right either. She stood still again. The saucy chickadee was back again, with three others. They chattered among themselves.

Marjory went forward—slower, slower, slower until she stopped short.

"I just can't go on and leave him anyway —so there," she said aloud so suddenly that all the startled chickadees flew away.

She turned around now and went swiftly

back to the road. She went just as swiftly along the road past the Hotel, stepping in Roger's tracks. By and by, just below where the mountain-road turned off, she saw where the tracks had turned around and gone back a little way, then gone forward again. Soon, she came to another place where they'd done the very same thing. And from this place, she saw Roger coming straight toward her. His head was up, his scowl was gone. As soon as he saw her he waved a mittened hand.

Marjory stood still and waved back.

"I'm not going," said Roger as he came up. "The mountain road doesn't look bad —but I'm not going."

Marjory wanted to say something, but she didn't know just what. So she kept quiet. After they had passed the Hotel, crossed the road, and were following the

snowshoe tracks across the fields, Roger spoke again.

"Were you coming after me, Mar?" he asked soberly.

"I had to, Roddy," said Marjory slowly.

When they were almost across the field, Roger said, "I say, Mar, you're a brick!"

"You're brick-i-er, I guess," said Marjory.

Then they both laughed.

"There's Susy coming to look for us, now," cried Marjory next minute, as Susy's head in its red cap suddenly appeared over the brow of the next hill.

"And there's Lissy with her," said Roger, as a blue cap came alongside the red one. "But what is that on the back of Susy's snowshoes?"

"It must be little Phil," said Marjory. The girls were coming down the hill, now,

shouting and waving their hands. "Look—he's standing right on the back of Susy's snowshoes and taking a step whenever she does."

"Who are all the rest of them?" asked Roger, as two more figures came into view.

"The tall one is Jeanne—Susy's big sister, I suppose," said Marjory. "But I don't know who the one is with the baby. Hurry, Roddy, I can't wait to know them all."

"Gee, Mar," said Roger with a wry face. "I'll never get over hating to meet strange people I guess."

"They're not strange," cried Marjory. "They're Susy's. Only, I didn't know there was another sister."

Marjory hurried Roger along up the hill while the little procession came down.

"Where have you been?" came Susy's excited voice above the others as they came

nearer. The next minute, Roger and Marjory were quite surrounded by Susy's family, all talking at once.

When things quieted down a little, Roger spoke out.

"It's my fault we're so late getting here," he said. "I wanted to go to Good Times Camp, and I did go a little way. But—I came back. It wasn't Mar's fault."

"There's no harm done, my dear," said the girl who was carrying the baby. "We've all had a nice little morning walk—that's all."

She had a pretty, dark, little face, with dark dancing eyes, and hair that wanted to break out in curls everywhere. Her voice was pretty and quick and full of life. It sounded the least-bit-foreign, someway. Every movement she made was quick and full of life, too.

"But Susy," said Marjory gazing from one to another of Susy's jolly, black-eyed family, "I didn't know you had two older sisters—you never told me."

"Two sisters?" laughed Susy. "She isn't my sister—she's my mother."

Every one laughed, Susy's little mother like the youngest of them all unless it was the baby, who cooed delightedly. Then she said, "Jeanne is taller than I am, now, and Susy will be—give her a year or two more. I tell them they have no respect for their little mother."

"Isn't she dear?" whispered Lissy to Marjory as they fell a little behind the others on the way to the house. "I just love her already."

"I must have seen her, I suppose," said Marjory, "that day last summer. But I didn't notice her—and anyway she was in

the car. I didn't see anything but Molly that day," she added, as they followed the others into the living-room of Susy's home.

"Oh Margie, doesn't it make you think of the Penny Bank?" cried Lissy, drawing a deep breath.

"It does," said Marjory, "but it isn't the room exactly."

"And the furniture isn't a bit the same, or the view from the windows, or anything," said Lissy. "Maybe it's the children—please, Mrs. Morris, may I take the baby?"

"It's partly the children, maybe," said Marjory. "But—there's something about the feel of things, Lissy. It's just as if the house was brimful of the good times that everyone has had and is going to have—oh, I can't say it, but you know, Lissy."

Lissy nodded. And Susy's mother cried delightedly.

"Ah, but that's just the way I want it to be, little Margie. I want this little home just as full of happiness as my own used to be—what good times we used to have, Pierre, Marie, and I," she added with a sigh.

"Uncle Pierre is now in the French army fighting for France," said Jeanne proudly.

"Roddy's cousin is in the war, too," said Marjory.

"Vive la France!" said little Philip, standing stiff and straight, as much like a soldier as he could.

"He says that whenever anyone says anything about the War," explained Susy. "Mother is French, you know. She lived in France till she married father."

Susy's mother left the room soon after, saying she was going to have an early dinner.

Jeanne went, too, to help her. Susy was excused today, because she had guests.

Lissy wouldn't give up the baby to anyone. She held him and cuddled him and sang snatches of song to him.

Marjory went about the room looking at things.

"What a pretty picture," she cried suddenly. She had paused before a large photograph on a small stand. "Who are the dear little girls, Susy?"

"Rosemary Dawson," laughed Susy.

"Which is Rosemary?" said Marjory, as they all clustered about the picture.

"Why, they're exactly alike," cried Lissy. "Or—does this one look a tiny bit soberer than the other?"

Susy laughed again. "I'll tell you," she said. "They're little twin girls we met in California last summer. They sent us this

picture for Christmas. They were staying near my uncle's bungalow in a lovely big bungalow which belonged to their Aunt Rose."

"But you haven't told who they are," said Marjory.

"Rose and Mary Dawson," said Susy. "But honestly, I can't tell which is which in the picture, myself. This is Rose, I think, and this is Mary. Now, I'll turn the picture over and see if I'm right—their names are written on the back where they belong . No, I'm not right at all. *This* is Rose and *this* is Mary. Wherever they go, no one can tell them apart."

"What fun!" cried Marjory. "Oh Lissy," how I do wish we were twins and looked as much alike as that."

"Better wish we both looked like you

then, Margie," said Lissy. "But wouldn't I like to see them?"

"Why maybe you will sometime," said Susy. "Their Aunt Rose almost promised she'd let them come up here to visit me. She lives in Boston. And they've an Aunt Mary Craig in New York."

"Oh, I know who she is," cried Marjory. "Her picture is in the Sunday supplements. She's on more committees even than Betty Blake's mother. She has just loads and loads of money—and she does wonderful things with it."

"Well," said Susy, "part of the time Rosemary Dawson lives with her, and part of the time with her Aunt Rose. But the home she likes best is 'way out in the country near a little town called Sugar River."

"What makes you call them Rosemary Dawson, Susy?" asked Marjory.

"When they speak of themselves together, they always do," said Susy. "So every one else does, too, in a little while. It's so funny to hear them. Rose will say, 'Well, is Rosemary Dawson going?' and Mary will answer, 'I think so.' Then Rose will say, 'What is she going to wear?' And Mary will answer, 'Her pink dress.' "

"But what makes them?" cried Marjory.

"They told us all about how it began," said Susy. "It seems one year they went to school, taking turns, first Rose, then Mary. They looked just alike, you see, and dressed just alike, and no one in the school knew there were two of them. And the name they gave for both of them was 'Rosemary Dawson.' "

"I don't see how they could ever do it," said Lissy.

"Well, they did," said Susy. "Their

Aunt Rose told mother all about it, too."

"I do hope we can know them," said Marjory.

"I could tell them apart," said Roger unexpectedly. He held the picture in his hand. "I can always tell Marjory from Lissy, if one comes into the room, even if I can't see them, or they don't speak, can't I, Mar?"

"Every single time," said Marjory, "even if we try to fool you. Aren't they the dearest things?" she added, looking at the picture in Roger's hands. "They must have very interesting times."

"They do," said Susy.

It almost seemed that the Rosemary Twins were going to speak out, themselves, as they stood there, hand in hand, free hands held out in greeting.

"Wouldn't it be lovely, Margie, if our

Martie Twins could know them?" said Lissy. "The Marties don't look a bit alike."

Then, of course, Susy had to be told all about the Martie Twins, Betty, Joe, and Fritz.

Right in the midst of one of the stories of Fritz, a man's voice spoke. Such a big kindly voice it was that all the children whirled around to see where it came from.

"Why father," cried Susy, "I didn't hear you come in."

Already little Philip was climbing up into his father's arms, and the baby was wailing to get there too.

"I've been listening to some of your stories, kiddies," he said, taking both children up and sitting down with them in a big chair.

"This is little Marjory Brook, I know,

and I suppose the others are Lissy and Roger that Susy's been so anxious to see. Well, I started to tell you that you came near having a dog for a Christmas present, Sue."

"A dog?" cried Susy. "Well, why didn't we then?"

"He refused to be had," said Mr. Morris. "He came up to me on the street in Ridgewood the other day and offered his paw in the friendliest fashion. I went into the hotel to find out if anyone knew anything about him. Someone said he came from Clover Patch, a big farm over south of us. When I came back, he'd disappeared. He was just the sort of dog I'd like to own."

"It sounds like Fritz," said Lissy. Her eyes were big and round.

"And you know, I'm just sure I saw—"

"Oh Lissy," cried Roger. "Don't begin

on that again, please. You know just as well as I do that Fritz is in New York."

"Well," said Lissy doubtfully, "I suppose he is, but—"

Luckily Lissy didn't have time for any more. For just then the door flew open, and Jeanne, bright-eyed and red-cheeked, said:

"Dinner is all ready!"

CHAPTER IV

VIVE LA FRANCE

NEVER before had the children eaten such a dinner as this. To begin with, the room itself was most unusual to find in a country farmhouse in the middle of the winter. It had long French windows which, on the south side of the room, opened into a goodsized glass room, full of sunshine and blossoming plants. The plants and the soft green silk curtains at the windows gave a summery look to everything. The fire in the grate gave a summery warmth. There were real flowers in the center of the table. At each place was a tiny boutonnière. Jeanne's clever fingers had made these of dainty

colored silks. No two were exactly alike.

"They're not fragrant like the real flowers," she said, "but they'll always bloom."

Instead of the Christmas turkey there was a roasted pig. It tried to look as much like a French pig as one born and bred in America possibly could. And it surely tasted like a French pig, for Mrs. Morris had cooked it in true French style. There were other French dishes. The children weren't just sure what they were, but they were all delicious.

There was chocolate to drink. There were chocolate èclairs to eat. There were some wonderful flat thin cakes which Susy's mother called "pleasures."

After dinner, Susy's mother disappeared with little Philip and baby Lucille. Jeanne, Susy, and the others washed, wiped,

and put away the flowered French china.

"We've a little surprise for you," said Susy as the last dish was set carefully in its place. "Will you stay here, please, till it's ready? Phil will tell you."

"Don't we have the best times wherever we go?" said Lissy, as the door closed behind Susy and Jeanne.

All three sat down in one of the big pleasant kitchen windows to wait for Susy's surprise. It wasn't long before the door into the dining-room flew open and there stood little Phil. But such a funny little Phil. He wore queer awkward trousers that came down about midway between his knees and his feet, coarse white stockings, and no shoes. He wore a dull blue waist like a smock. On his head was a round red cap. And around his neck was a red scarf.

"Monsieur Philippe," he said gravely.

Then he jabbered a few French words just below his breath.

"He wants us to come in," said Lissy, taking Philip's hand. "But where on earth are your shoes, dear?"

To their surprise, instead of answering, Monsieur Philippe suddenly stuck out his little red tongue and grasped it firmly between his thumb and forefinger.

"He's afraid he'll tell," giggled Susy. "Mother told him once to hold his tongue, and he always does now."

Susy's mother came forward smiling, greeting them in French. She had become the prettiest of little French matrons. The two girls had become delightful little French girls. They were introduced as Madamoiselle Jeanne and Madamoiselle Susanne. Even baby Lucille was now a French baby.

"'He wants us to come in,' said Lissy."

Really, for a few minutes, Lucille's part in the conversation was all Marjory and Lissy and Roger could understand. For while the others all chattered away in French, she cooed and gurgled away in her baby-language which is much the same the world over.

"Oh, I'm going to learn French just as soon as I get back home," cried Marjory. "How do you ever do it, Susy?"

"I learned it before I did English," said Susy.

"And is your real name Susanne?" asked Lissy.

"It's prettier than Susy, isn't it?" said Susy.

"Heaps prettier," said Marjory. "I shall always call you that, when I don't forget."

All the pretty French keepsakes Susy's

mother had brought from her own home had been brought out to show the children. She showed them a worn and faded figure of one of the Three Wise Men.

"It was once a part of the little stable in our church at home," she said. "There were figures of Mary and Joseph and the little Christ in his cradle. And there were tiny oxen in their stall. And real straw. We children used to love to help freshen up the little stable each year just before Christmas."

Then there was a tiny figure of Jeanne d'Arc which she showed them reverently.

"I have her name," said Jeanne proudly. "You know the story of The Maid?" she said.

"Doris told us something about her," said Marjory, "but we'd love to hear it again."

As long as they live, Marjory and Lissy

and Roger will remember the story of Jeanne d'Arc as Susy's mother told it that winter afternoon before the fire. Every one of the listening children glowed with patriotism and longed for a chance to do something great and glorious too.

"She will lead France again to victory," said Susy's mother, a wonderful light behind the tears in her dark eyes. She glanced from the tiny figure of The Maid to the Tri-color which, with the Union Jack and The Star Spangled Banner, hung over the mantel.

"Vive la France!" shouted Monsieur Philippe. He came stiffly to salute.

Every one saluted. And as if at a signal, Susy's mother, Jeanne, Susy, and little Philippe sang "The Marseillaise," the others joining in as well as they could. Then they sang "God Save the King!" And then

"The Star Spangled Banner," till the little room fairly rang.

"But we must have our Christmas," cried Susy's mother, when the last note died away, except for some of Monsieur Philippe's, which had come out behind the others. "I wanted to have you over night so that we might have a glow-worm procession."

"A glow-worm procession?" cried Marjory.

"The night before Christmas," went on Susy's mother, "in our little town, we children were allowed to sit up until time for the late services in the church. It was a great occasion. We played our noisiest games to keep awake. Then when it was time, we used to go with father and mother to church. All the neighbors turned out too. Each one carried a lantern. It was funny enough to see the lanterns bobbing about

the dark streets. They looked like glow-worms. When church was over, we came back to a hot supper. In the middle of the night—think of it. But it happened only once a year, remember. We were so excited—Pierre, Marie, and I—we used to beg to stay up till the first red ray of morning brought the little Christ Child with gifts for us. But no indeed—at the most interesting minute, we were sent off to bed."

"Did you really believe the Christ Child sent the gifts?" asked Lissy.

"At first," smiled Lissy's mother. "But after, when we knew better, we still liked to think he did. And after all, it was love that sent them, wasn't it?"

"Of course," said Lissy thoughtfully.

"Didn't you have a tree?" asked Marjory.

"Not often in our little home town," said

Susy's mother. "Of course, in Paris, there are trees and wonderful celebrations, even your own Santa Claus. There were, I mean," she added sadly. "The War has changed everything."

"Vive la France," cried Monsieur Philippe.

"But our Santa Claus really went over there this year, didn't he?" said Lissy, "aboard the Christmas Ship? That will help a little."

"Didn't you hang up your stockings?" asked Roger.

Susy's mother shook her head.

"Look about all of you and see if you can't find what we did do," she said. "Careful, now, Philip."

So while the others watched and laughed and Monsieur Philippe grasped his little tell-tale of a tongue, Lissy and Marjory and

Roger hunted about the room to find something to take the place of Christmas stockings.

"Shoes!" cried Roger at last.

And there, in a half-circle under the mantel, was a row of quaint little shoes. Four pairs were leather slippers with straps. Three were clumsy wooden affairs.

"Count them, count them," cried Susy dancing about with Philip.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven pairs," counted the three eager little guests.

"There's a pair apiece," cried Susy. "Phil couldn't wear the ones that go with his costume because they had to be borrowed for this. And we were so afraid he'd tell."

"I didn't, I didn't," cried Philip. "I held my tongue."

The three little guests were down on the

floor examining the Christmas shoes. In one of each pair was a slip of paper with a name written on it—Lissy, Roger, Marjory, Jeanne, Susy, Philip, Lucille. And each shoe held its little gifts. The little guests had never before had any such gifts—pretty hand-made boxes filled with bonbons such as only Susy's mother could make, candied fruit in tiny baskets, bits of jewelry, and little French toys that she had played with when she was a child.

"Now bring the chestnuts," cried Susy's mother.

While they all roasted and ate chestnuts, Susy's mother sat down on the floor with them and told them stories of her own little girlhood. She had belonged to a fine French family they found. They did so want to ask her how she happened to meet and marry an American. But at last she

told them how she had come to the United States to visit some friends, had fallen in love with the big jolly farmer, had gone back home, and he had come after her.

When that story was over, Susy and Jeanne pulled down all the dark green shades. And they had a little procession, each carrying a little lighted taper. Round and round the room they went, all singing, as best they could, a French Christmas carol. Every one knew the music, so it didn't matter that some sang French and some English words.

"I'd like to keep you, indeed I would," said Susy's mother. "But I promised that stately grandmother of yours I'd send you home early. So here you go." She threw up both hands in one of her pretty quick French gestures.

"I must run and change back from

Madamoiselle Susanne to plain Susy," cried Susy. "Wouldn't the Grandmas all stare if a little French girl should bring you home?"

"Please don't change," begged Marjory. "I want the Grandmas to see Madamoiselle Susanne. Granny'd just love her."

"Oh no, you must change," said Susy's mother. "For you are to stay all night and to-morrow, Susanne—you and Molly."

"Oh goody, goody," cried Susy scampering away to become plain Susy as soon as possible.

It was a jolly little cutterful that went spinning down the hill a half-hour or so later. The west was still a warm golden color. The snow crisped and glowed under Molly's flying feet.

"Of course I don't know," said Lissy patting her bright blue and orange boutonnière, "but I don't believe any one any-

where in the whole world is having a lovelier Christmas than we are."

"I know it," said Marjory snuggling down under the robe. "If only the Ben Baker bunch could have been here too!"

CHAPTER V

A WINTER PICNIC

THERE was scarcely time to tell the Grandmas all about the French Christmas up in the farm-house on the hill, before, right after supper, the children were sent to bed.

"We never go so early at home," Marjory said.

"Never mind," said Lissy, "the sooner we go to sleep, the sooner it will be morning."

Next morning, at breakfast, Grandma Beach said quietly, "Would you children like to go to Good Times Camp to-day?"

"Good Times Camp?" cried Marjory.

"Could we?" cried Lissy.

"I thought you said we couldn't," cried Roger.

Susy said nothing. But her eyes were bigger and blacker than ever.

"I said, 'Good Times Camp? Why my dear, in the middle of the winter?' " said Grandma Beach. "I didn't say you couldn't go."

"Daddy didn't know whether you'd think we'd better or not," said Marjory. "And we were not to tease about it."

"I went a little way yesterday, Grandma Beach," said Roger. "But I came back."

"Wesley has been up several times, so the roads are open and good," said Grandma. "And he's had a fire there every day for more than a week, so it's quite warm and comfortable, he says. So, if you'd really like to," she paused. And it did seem that

her fine old eyes wanted to twinkle like Granny's.

"Me, too?" said Susy finding her tongue.

"You are to drive Molly," said Grandma Beach. "I told your Mother all about it. And she was willing. Wesley has made a shelter for Molly, and with plenty of blankets he says she will be all right. Anyway, you can stay only while it's bright and sunny, you know."

All the way up to the Camp, through the wonderful white woods, where the brook could be heard at times whispering in its winter sleep, the children talked about how good it was of Grandma Beach to let them come.

"I'm so glad I didn't go yesterday," said Roger.

Marjory smiled at him.

"I did so want to see it," she said.

"I didn't see how we could wait till next summer," said Lissy. "And aren't the woods just lovely in winter?"

Wesley had gone on ahead to make sure the road was all right for Molly and her red cutter. He carried extra blankets, wraps, snowshoes, two big lunch-baskets, and thermos bottles of hot milk and cocoa.

"Your Grandma has changed wonderfully," said Susy. "Mother says she isn't like the same person since she's found her granddaughters."

"Aren't you glad you came last summer, Margie?" asked Lissy.

"Aren't you glad *you* did?" said Marjory.

"Aren't you glad they did, Roger?" laughed Susy.

"And aren't *you* glad they did, Susy?" added Roger.

Every one laughed. Molly stopped short. She looked her happy load over. Then she neighed in her funny little way, kicked up her heels, and ran every step of the way up the next hill.

So, laughing and chattering and jingle-jangling, the cutterful of little folks climbed the long white trail, where the tree-shadows lay soft and blue across the snow, and came, at last, in sight of Good Times Camp. It did look pretty and homey among its evergreens and white birches. Smoke poured out of its chimney. There were Christmas wreaths in the windows.

A great wreath of ground-pine hung over the front door.

"It makes it seem just like coming home," cried Marjory, "to see the smoke and the Chrismas greens. But who do you suppose thought of them—Wesley or the Grandmas?"

Wesley wasn't anywhere in sight, nor the big sleigh either. But the little folks climbed out, put Molly in the little lean-to, which Wesley had made, and covered her warmly. Then together they all rushed up the steps across the porch, and burst through the door into the little living-room.

"Wesley must have gone for wood, or something," said Roger, when the room proved to be quite empty save for a pile of robes, snowshoes, and lunch-basket, and the roar and crackle of a great fire in the fire-place.

"How lovely to have—" began Lissy, when "Boof! Boof! Boof!" cried a familiar voice right in the middle of her sentence. And suddenly, from somewhere, right into the middle of the room, sprang Fritz.

On his collar was a perky red ribbon bow. He capered about like a puppy, upsetting

snowshoes, lunch-baskets, everything that came in his way. Then, while Roger carefully righted the baskets, he began going the rounds offering his paw in his usual friendly fashion.

"Fritz!" cried three little campers, as if they had but one voice and that voice could say but one word, and that one word had a big exclamation point after it. And "Fritz?" came Susy's voice trailing after, with a question-mark. She'd never seen Fritz before, although she'd heard so much about him, she was sure it must be the wonderful dog himself.

"I did see him, I told you I did," cried Lissy, finding her breath first.

"Did, did you?" said a teasing voice somewhere, that could belong only to Joe.

Right after it rippled a little low laugh that could belong only to Betty.

Then came an unmistakeable giggle. Only Nancy Spindle giggled in that wholly delightful fashion.

And Martha's voice, half muffled, called "Do hurry and find us!" While Martin's said, "Sh-sh!" anxiously.

Fritz routed out Joe hidden behind the bunks. Roger went straight to Betty just outside the living-room door in the kitchen. Lissy and Marjory found Martha and Martin under a great pile of robes and pillows in one corner of the room. Nancy forgot to stay in hiding, wherever she'd been, and came out to help the others search. And the little camp just brimmed over with boys and girls and a dog who took up as much room and made as much noise as three dogs. At the kitchen-door looking on and enjoying the fun was Wesley.

"We thought it all up two weeks ago,"

said Joe. "Or Betty began it, of course. How we'd come up here to the Camp first and surprise you. We talked it over with father and mother and they helped and planned too. Then we called up the Grandmas and they agreed to help get ready and keep it a great secret. Then, at the very last minute, so there wouldn't be time for you to ask many questions, father 'phoned you. He said we couldn't come with you as we'd planned. Well, we couldn't and carry out our new plans. See? And, of course, later, he told your father, all about it, Mar."

"And we were there in the station that day," said Betty, "hiding from you behind the pillars. We were so afraid you'd see us. Joe stayed outside most of the time with Fritz. And we had to ride all the way to Ridgewood in a day-coach because

there was only one chair-car coming through to Ridgewood. And you were in that."

"Then I did see Fritz," cried Lissy.

"Did you, Lissy?" asked Martin. "Where?"

"In the looking-glass of the car," said Lissy.

"We were afraid you would," said Martin in his slow precise way. "You see Joe and I were trying to get him on the baggage car. Maybe he saw you and wanted to speak to you. Anyhow, he dragged Joe and me, both, straight into the aisle of your coach. And it took us some time to get him out."

"I had just a glimpse of him," laughed Lissy. "The glass was just in front of me, you see. Then I heard him bark in the station in Ridgewood, didn't I?"

"You'd been stone-deaf if you hadn't," said Joe. "We coaxed the train-man to let us off on the other side away from the station so you wouldn't see us. Then Fritz raised his voice and wailed."

"But where have you been all the time?" cried Marjory still lost in wonder at the way Ben Baker's bunch had carried out such a delightful plan. "Why haven't we seen you somewhere?"

"Uncle Ben met us in Ridgewood," explained Nancy Spindle. "And we stayed at the hotel there over Sunday. Then, yesterday, we came up here and helped get things ready. Wesley was here, too."

"And we were up at Susy's and never knew," cried Lissy.

"Why we've never introduced Susy," said Marjory.

She and Lissy both put an arm around Susy and brought her forward.

"This is Susy Morris," said Marjory.

"Yesterday, she was Mademoiselle Susanne," said Roger.

Every one smiled at Susy.

"Black-eyed Susan, I should call her," said Joe.

"Well, I'm glad we're all here together at last," said Nancy. "It's worth all the planning and working and waiting. And now, we're going to have the best dinner. Just look at all the lunch-baskets."

"Do let's eat it early and have lots of afternoon," suggested Martha.

CHAPTER VI

FRITZ PLANS A HOUSE PARTY

WESLEY couldn't stay. He left the fire and everything else in Joe's care, and drove the big empty sleigh back down the hill. If Uncle Ben Baker could get through some important business in Ridgewood he was coming up in the afternoon, and they were all to have a snowshoe hike through the woods to the hotel. If he wasn't there by three o' clock they were to start out by themselves, so as to reach the hotel before dark. Marjory, Lissy, Susy, and Roger were to have their supper at the hotel with Ben Baker's bunch of little folks.

All these delightful plans came out, one

by one, while the little folks ate their dinner. Every one agreed that, while they had had many wonderful meals together, there had never been one quite like this eaten in the very heart of the winter woods.

"What's the very nicest thing we can do this afternoon?" said Betty, when they had all eaten all they could. "The very Christmasiest?"

Nancy and Lissy were already bustling about, packing the lunch-baskets.

"I think," said Marjory, "it would be lovely to go out in the woods, cut a Christmas Tree, bring it in, and set it up here by our own fireplace."

This plan pleased every one. So out they all trooped to find just the right tree for the little room. It was very small, of course, but beautifully shaped. It had some little cones of its own, and an empty bird's nest

high in its branches. When it was hung with red apples and stems of raisins left over from dinner, it was as pretty as any little tree could ever wish to be.

But getting a Christmas Tree, dragging it home, setting it up, and trimming it, all together take time. And when it was finished and they were all resting around the fire, taking great breaths of spicy balsam fragrance, Nancy noticed that already it was growing dark.

"It's all clouded over," said Joe from the window. "And it snows just a little."

"Oh goodie!" cried Marjory, "I do so want a real big snow-storm while we're here."

"Hear the wind," said Betty. "Isn't it lovely through the pines 'way up here?"

"We'll have to wait till three, I guess," said Joe anxiously, coming from the win-

dow. "Because Uncle Ben is coming up the short way, if he comes, and we're going down the long way, and we'd miss him, and he'd be worried."

"Of course we'll wait," said Lissy happily. "I'd like to stay here all night. Betty, tell us a story."

"I'll tell you a Belgian fairy-story mother tells me," said Betty. "It belongs to the woods and a snow-storm."

Several times, in the midst of Betty's fairy-story, Joe glanced anxiously toward the window. The snowflakes were flying airily now. The wind blew in gales. At five minutes of three, when Betty's story came to a delightful close, he said,

"Let's get all ready, now, to save time. Then, if Uncle Ben comes, we can start right out."

So on went sweaters, coats, caps, scarfs,

leggings, and mittens. It might almost have been an expedition starting for the North Pole, Martin said. The fire was left just as Wesley had told them it should be. Then the whole bunch went out on the porch and began strapping on snowshoes.

"Who's going to ride?" cried Susy. "Molly's got to get home, and she can't snowshoe."

"You better drive her, Susan," said Joe. "She knows your touch best. And Margie must ride, because she hasn't walked much on snowshoes, yet, and Roger, because he mustn't get tired."

"I'll change off when any of you get tired," said Marjory.

Just about three the bunch left the camp. Lunch-baskets and robes had to be left behind. Wesley could come for them.

Down the road they started, laughing and

shouting. The white winter woods were so wonderful. It did seem that the snow-shoe hike was to be the very best part of a very happy day. There must be more than an hour of good daylight left, too, Joe thought.

How it did snow. The snowflakes were large and soft and filled the air with a white fleece. It was beautiful, although it did heap up the track and was hard to look through, especially when the wind blew. But no one minded. Martha lost the track once or twice and had to be brought back by Martin.

"I'll watch Molly every minute," said Susy, "else she'll take the wrong turn and carry us up home instead of to The Pines."

"That would be a mistake, Susan," said Joe. "We'll all look out for that turn."

Just what became of that turn that snowy

winter afternoon, no one ever quite knew. Probably the snow hid the familiar landmarks, as it has a way of doing, so that there was nothing to guide the little folks. Probably Susy tried too hard to show Molly just what to do. Anyhow, they didn't find any turn—or if they did, they didn't recognize it. They just kept going and going and going, and getting nowhere nearer it, or so it seemed. After awhile, Joe, peering at his watch, called a halt to talk things over.

"It's getting to be a regular blizzard," he said, as they all gathered about Molly and the little red cutter. Blasts of wind blew them against it and each other as they talked. The snow came thick and fast, now, folding them in a great soft white blanket.

The cutter began to look like a small snowbank, itself, with three rosy faces peer-

ing out of it. Molly shook herself impatiently, and her bells jing-jangled in a muffled sort of way.

"We'll just have to go on as best we can," said Joe. "Of course we can't be far from The Pines. Now listen—every one. Betty and I will go ahead. Then Molly and her load. Then the Marties—don't lose Martha, Martin. And, Nancy, you come last so as to keep track of them all."

Nothing was said about where Fritz should go. During the conversation, he sat on Joe's snowshoes and seemed to be listening intently. And when they all started along, Nancy, rounding them up, like an anxious watch-dog, he decided to do as he pleased. Sometimes he scouted ahead. Sometimes he helped Nancy. Sometimes he was close to Molly. Sometimes he was nowhere to be seen.

Because they had to stop so often to call him, Joe, at last, took the lead from his pocket and fastened it to the dog's collar.

"Now, we'll see, old fellow," he said. "Wherever you take it into your head to go, I'll just go along with you."

On and on they went, Fritz trotting quietly beside Joe and Betty. Molly's bells jingled more and more feebly. Sometimes the cutter scraped along on one runner. On and on, stopping to free their snowshoes from snow, gasping for breath when the wind swept down upon them, still peering anxiously for signs of the turn, or even the big hotel, itself, among its tall pines.

Then Martha stumbled, fell, and rolled over like a great snowball. It took Martin, Nancy, and Joe to get her right side up again, with snowshoes untangled. Then the

cutter tip-tilted so dangerously that Joe had to spring to hold that up.

"Keep Fritz, Bet. Don't let go!" he cried, throwing the lead to Betty, who caught it and clutched it fast.

With all the rest, the white twilight of the woods was beginning to be gray. The early winter night was coming. And still there was no village in sight anywhere.

"We're out of the road, I think," said Joe. "Though there's some kind of a track that Molly keeps in. But there aren't many trees any more."

Just at this minute, Fritz set up a sudden barking. Like a flash, he dashed away from what they had tried to think was a track of some kind and set off furiously across the almost cleared space. Holding fast, as she felt she must, Betty found herself dashing along back of him, much faster

than she had ever before traveled on snowshoes. Up and down, up and down over uneven ground, over the top of a fence just visible in the drifts, over a strip of ice, perilously thin, on and on and on, flew that dog.

Clutching the lead, dashing the snow from her face, on and on behind him, flew Betty. She couldn't look to see what had become of the others. She couldn't look to see where she was going.

She could just hold on to that lead and watch, as well as she could, those treacherous snowshoes of hers. Then she forgot all about them, and just gave herself up to what seemed to be flying down a long, long hill, and across a broad free space of meadow toward what looked like a real light. Betty's eyes clung to that light, as it came and went in the snow, as fast as her hands clung

to Fritz. Nearer and nearer, clearer and clearer, it came. Then, blurred and indistinct, not so far away, she could see the friendly red roofs of a great barn, where cattle lowed faintly. Beyond these roofs, in a minute, showed another friendly red roof. And below this, was the light again, which was really a welcoming window.

On they skimmed, over other fences, across what was probably a yard, up some steps, across a porch, banging with such force into a door that it flew wide open. Then, snowshoes clattering wildly, still clutching the lead with half frozen hands, Betty made her sudden entry into the middle of a warm, supper-scented kitchen.

There was a pretty, pink-checked, little woman who bustled toward her. There were young wondering faces all about her.

There was a dog barking wildly and a

voice saying, "Well, well, Fritz, where did you come from?" Then for a few minutes, Betty didn't see or hear anything more.

The next she knew she was lying in a little heap on a lounge in one corner of the room. Some one was rubbing her hands. Joe was taking off her snowshoes. Nancy was trying to get off her coat.

"She's all right, now, aren't you, my dear?" that same brisk busy little voice was saying. Betty smiled at the pink-cheeked little woman who exactly matched her voice, said "Yes" quite feebly, and was glad to lie still a little longer while the rest took off her wraps and Fritz licked her hand.

"Are you all here?" she asked after a minute, sitting up and looking around.

"Every one except Molly, and she's in the barn," said Joe. "All right now, Bet?"

Then they all went on to tell her how,

as best they could, with Molly, they had all followed her. Of course, they had come in a much more round-about fashion. But come they had.

"You looked just like a great red bird skimming over the hills," said Marjory, squeezing Betty to make sure she was there and quite all right.

"And then you were just a speck of red through the snow," said Martha.

"And then you weren't anywhere at all," cried Lissy. "And how we did hurry to find you again."

"Why didn't you let go, Bet?" asked Joe. His voice was still anxious.

"You told me to hold on to Fritz," said Betty. Then, suddenly she laughed merrily. "It seems funny, doesn't it, but after that first minute I never once thought that I could let go."

"Well, if you're all right, I'm glad you didn't," said Joe. "Because as usual, Fritz has brought us somewhere."

"You couldn't have come to a better place than Clover Patch, not if you'd tried for hours," cried the pink-cheeked little woman. "Every one's welcome here at all hours of day or night—especially young folks and dogs. Fritz knows that. Now, let's see—you're Joel Bernard, you say. The one that came on the lead is Betty somebody. This is Nancy Spindle. These are Martin and Martha Wren—not the Marties that got lost that time?"

"Martin did," said Martha.

"This is little Marjory Brook," went on the brisk little woman, "who belongs to my old friend, Margaret Beach down at The Willows. This is Lissy Penny, who's her sister, if she hasn't the same name. Your

grandma's told me all about you, you see. This is Roger Kent. And Susy Morris, of course, from 'way up the mountain road. Oh, I know you, Susy, and your little horse, too. Now, I'm Miss Araminta Clover—the Miss Clover who's always adopting babies—ever heard of her? That girl over there, who looks about sixteen, but who's really a married woman with two babies of her own, is my adopted daughter, Anne Clover Story. That tall slim girl is Effie Clover. That great boy, who's just come in from helping Jake take care of the pony, is John Thomas Clover. The babies, of course, are Anne's. Aren't we a happy Clover Bunch? Fritz thinks so. He's been coming to see us ever since he was a puppy. Ever since that nice yellow-haired boy, over there, was a baby. That's David Cary Clover. Now, while Anne and Effie

and I get you a good hot supper, you just toast yourselves around the fire in the living-room." She threw open a door into another room bright with lamplight, which proved to be a great dining room. And beyond that was another, where a ruddy fire roared its welcome.

"Couldn't we get home, possibly, Miss Clover?" asked Joe, as they all trooped into this room.

"I'm Aunt Minty, please," said Miss Araminta. "All the children everywhere around call me that. It's too far to go in this storm. But we'll just do a little telephoning. Then, everything will be as right as right."

Almost before any one could think, Aunt Minty was talking with Celia at The Willows. She explained that every one was safe and would stay till morning at Clover

Patch. The Grandmothers hadn't thought of worrying, of course, because they supposed the children were at The Pines for supper. And Celia would explain everything to Susy's people. Then Aunt Minty talked with a very anxious Uncle Ben at The Pines, who had been 'way up to the camp and back.

"Of course, I can keep them all, even Fritz, if he'll stay," laughed Aunt Minty into the receiver. "Don't you know, Ben Baker, that I've been adopting babies and building on rooms for them till my house is almost as big as that famous Bernard Home in New York? Come to-morrow, and see for yourself."

"Have you really?" cried Nancy Spindle, when Aunt Minty came chuckling from the telephone to the fireplace.

"Ten years ago I took Effie and Johnny,"

said Aunt Minty. "Then I took little Anne and David. Since then I've had ever so many for awhile, finding real homes for them somewhere."

"That's what I shall do when I've been made into a graduate nurse," said Nancy. "I've just decided."

"Nancy's been in the Bernard Home you just spoke of," explained Betty.

"Why, it's your mother—bless her—that started that Home isn't it?" cried Aunt Minty. "And this is the Joe that put the thought into her head? And you're the blessed Betty that caused that wonderful Betty Blake Annex. Well, isn't this the luckiest storm that ever stormed?"

"It's like a house party," said Marjory.

"It's Fritz's house party," said Roger. "Didn't he fairly drag Betty here? And

didn't all the rest of us just have to come, too?"

In the midst of the shout that went up at the idea of Fritz's having a house party of all his friends, the door into the dining room opened.

"Supper's all ready," said little Anne.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIFTH CHRISTMAS TREE

"THIS table looks just as if it had been expecting us, Aunt Minty," said Lissy, as she slipped into her place at the long dining room table.

The Clover Bunch laughed and looked at Aunt Minty. She laughed, too.

"It's like this," she said. "Before Fritz and Betty arrived here to-night, we were about the mournfulest Clover Bunch you ever saw. I had invited all my little adopted children from near and far to a big Christmas Tree party. All day long the telephone has rung to tell me that, owing to a storm, this one and that one and the other one couldn't come. This storm, you see,

has been raging up in the mountains since morning. We'd just heard from the last one, when we heard Fritz barking. Now, you see, the supper and the tree and everything come in just as handy as can be."

"This will make Lissy's and Roger's and my fifth Christmas Tree!" laughed Marjory. "Isn't it just lovely?"

"Wait till you see a Clover Christmas Tree," cried David Clover. He was the happiest looking boy, with red cheeks and blue eyes and yellow hair. He was a little younger than Roger, and a little older than the Marties.

"At a Clover Christmas Tree," said Effie, "every one has to do something." Effie was about Nancy's age, tall and serious, with wonderfully bright dark eyes under a cloud of soft dark hair.

"There isn't anything I can do," said Roger anxiously.

"I know," said Aunt Minty, smiling across the table at him. "When we get where it's polite to whisper, I'll tell you all about it."

When supper was over, Lissy helped wash dishes. Nancy cuddled the two Story babies. Aunt Minty talked softly to Roger in a firelit corner. By and by, she called Susy, who joined in the whispers and giggles. And when Roger and Susy came back to the others before the fire, they were very quiet and important with their secret, whatever it was.

When every one was ready David and Anne threw open the doors into the long room which ran across the whole front of the house. There stood the biggest Tree yet, sparkling with lights, and gleaming

with tinsel, colored balls, bells, and birds. At the very top flashed a great white star.

After the "Oh-ing" and "Ah-ing" had died down a little, and every one had found a seat, Aunt Minty said,

"As Effie said, we always have some sort of a simple little program with our Christmas Trees. We think, here at Clover Patch, that we have better times when every one has something to do toward making them. Now, every one, do just the thing you like to do. That's almost always the thing you can do best, you know. First of all, because she's my oldest daughter, I'll call on little Anne."

Anne stepped out of the group and faced the eager little faces, smiling and blushing a little.

"Last night," she said, "I wrote a little Christmas poem. It isn't very good but I'm

going to say it to you. I call it 'Christmas Candles.' "

Then, still smiling and blushing, Anne recited:

"Said a little crimson candle to a candle all in green,
As together on the Christmas Tree their pretty heads did lean,
'With glance so bright and dance so light, let's try—just you and me—
To set the night alight with joy for everyone to see!'

"And somehow all the candles—the dear Miss Netticoats—
They heard the happy whisper and cleared their sputtery throats,
With glance so bright and dance so light, with all her little heart,
To set the night alight with joy, each did her little part.

"Their little rays went such a ways they set the room ablaze;
The fire saw and told the wind that in the chimney stays,

The wind told all the snowflakes, the snowflakes told each breeze,
The breezes told the other fires, the fires the other Trees.

"Old candles told the gold ones, the gold ones told the blue,
The blue ones told the new ones, till every candle knew.
With glance so bright and dance so light, on every Christmas Tree,
They set the night a-light with joy for everyone to see.

"The Moon-Man laughed to see them—it was a pretty sight,
Ten million billion candles all dancing in the night!
The stars rushed out together—with twinkles in their eyes,
And for each candle on the earth they lit one in the skies!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Marjory, when Anne had finished and the clapping had died down a little. "Did you make that all up, every bit yourself?"

Anne nodded.

"The babies like my verses," she said

modestly. "So I do a good many of them."

"I'm going to write a book, myself, someday," confided Marjory. "But I don't believe I can write any poems like that."

Just here, Aunt Minty called on Joe.

"John's going to help me out," said Joe.

With Betty to play for them on the piano, Joe and Johnny sang a college song. Every one liked it so well they had to sing several others. By the end of the third every one was singing. And Fritz was beating his tail up and down like a baton.

"Effie, next," called Aunt Minty.

Effie, who was the soberest looking little person, made them laugh till they cried, with a funny reading. They were still wiping their eyes when Aunt Minty called for Lissy.

"I've said so many times that I couldn't do fancy things like Margie and Betty,"

said Lissy, "that Joe's written this for me to say. I hope you'll like it." Then she recited:

"Said a busy young woman, named Penny,
Accomplishments I haven't many,
But, say, I can make
The best 'lasses cake—
You'll want a whole tinful, if any!"

"I didn't know you wrote poetry, Joe," cried Marjory.

"Won't you please write one for me," begged Martha.

" 'Tisn't as good as Lissy's gingerbread," said Joe.

"She shall make some to-morrow," said Aunt Minty.

David came next. He imitated a robin, then a bluebird, and then a song-sparrow so cleverly, that Fritz, who had been dozing sat up and looked wildly around.

"I had to just *be* the fat lady in our

circus, last summer," said Martha, when she was called upon, " 'cause there isn't really anything I can *do*."

"If I can help her," said Martin eagerly, "we'll try to make Fritz do a trick we taught him."

"Fritz took part in the little game of balls with great good nature. He caught them in his mouth, batted at them with his paws, ran after them, and brought them back. Finally, he ran to the Tree, picked out a jumping-jack, and carried it to Betty, his tail wagging gleefully.

When Clover and Junior, Anne's babies, went, hand in hand, to say a rhyme, he went, too, standing between them. No one knew what the babies said, but every one was delighted with them—and the dog. Nancy Spindle ran to them, picked them up, and snuggled them both in her motherly arms.

"Your turn, Nancy," said Aunt Minty.

Nancy sat right down on the floor with the kiddies in her arms.

"Christmas isn't quite Christmas, is it?" she said, "without the Christmas Story? May I just tell it to the babies—you needn't listen."

But every one listened, hushed and quiet, while Nancy told in her own sweet way about the little town of Bethlehem, and the shepherds, the song, the star, the manger, and the Baby. And when she took her seat again, Betty said softly,

"Please make it my turn, Aunt Minty. And I'll play the Bethlehem Song, and we'll all sing it together."

So, while Betty played, they all sang, "Little Town of Bethlehem," "Holy Night," and "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear."

When Marjory's turn came, she was so full of Christmas that she fairly gleamed with joy and good-will to everybody.

"I'm going to be a little Christmas Candle, like the one in Anne's poem," she said. "The crimson one who started all the others to shining. Betty, you please play something that sounds like fires and candles and stars and snowflakes, will you?"

Betty laughed, as she went back to the piano.

"I'll do my best," she said.

Marjory was lovely as a Christmas Candle. She flickered and twinkled and sent out rays as she spun about. Then she called out to them all to be Christmas Candles with her, and such a merry dance as they had about the tree, Fritz side-stepping along with the others.

At the end of the dance, when every one

"SHE FLICKERED AND TWINKLED AND SENT OUT RAYS AS SHE SPUN ABOUT."

was breathless, out from either side of the tree sprang two little figures. One was Santa Claus—every one knew him. And the other, every one guessed, was Mrs. Santa Claus. They took hold of hands, bowed, and said,

"A Merry Christmas to Every One!"

Then, while Aunt Minty took oranges, apples, candy, and nuts from the tree, they distributed them.

"And now for the Jack Horner Pie," cried Aunt Minty.

Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus dashed behind the tree again, and came back, bringing between them a wonderful pie. It had been made by covering a big dish-pan with brown paper. It was painted to look exactly like a pie.

"Come, put in your thumb,
And pull out your plum!"

cried Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus, as they passed the big pie in and out among the little folks.

The plums were funny enough—they had been planned for Aunt Minty's babies. There were rattles and woolly lambs and furry cats and squeaking pigs. Marjory drew a donkey who brayed when you pulled a string. Martin drew a plum for Fritz. It turned out to be a chocolate mouse. Fritz swallowed it with one gulp, and begged for another.

When all the plums had been drawn, they all settled down around the fire. Outside, the wind roared and the snow drove against the windows. But the cold snowy outside only made the warm bright inside cheerier and cozier. Junior and Clover were soon fast asleep. Fritz snored loudly.

Margie's golden head nodded. She sat up straight suddenly, saying,

"Oh, was that a dream? It was something about when Fritz was just a little little dog—I can't remember what."

"Before you start in on another dream, Margie," said Aunt Minty, "let's go to bed, where you can do it more comfortably. Now, let's see—Anne, you take one baby, and I'll take the other. Nancy, you go in with Effie—you'll like Effie's room. Betty, Martha, Lissy, Margie, and Susy can have the big Clover room with the alcove. There are two beds in that and a cot beside."

"What fun!" cried Lissy.

"John, you take Joe," went on Aunt Minty, counting off her household. "That leaves Roger and Martin and David to go in David's big room—one on the cot.

Everything comes out exactly right. Fritz, you planned your house party well."

"Aunt Minty's like the little old lady who had so many children, only she isn't old, and she does know what to do with them," said Lissy.

"Where does Fritz sleep?" said Marjory.

"He has a bed in the kitchen, always ready, when he wants to use it," said Aunt Minty. "But there's no telling where he may decide to go to-night. Among so many friends, it will be hard to choose, won't it, old fellow?"

Fritz sat up stiff and straight before the dying fire. He, probably, was making up his mind. Anyway, later, when giggles and chatter from the different rooms up-stairs told that every one was going to bed, he bounded up the stairs, and without any hesi-

tation stretched himself out on the rug beside David's cot in the boy's room.

"He's always true to his baby," said Aunt Minty, when she saw him. "Well, he's known David longer than he has any of the rest of us, you see."

CHAPTER VIII

SNOW-BOUND

LISSY was just going off in a dream when Marjory said softly, "What do you suppose Aunt Minty meant? She said Fritz had known David longer than he had any of the rest of us. Longer than Joe, do you suppose?"

Lissy tried to answer, but only succeeded in grunting. But Betty's voice from the cot in the alcove answered as softly as Marjory's had asked,

"I don't know. Didn't it sound interesting? Let's not forget to ask about it before we go in the morning."

But when morning came there was no question of any one's going anywhere.

Outside, there was nothing to see except snow, unless you counted the wind. Marjory was sure she could see that.

"Where will all the snow go to?" she asked anxiously, "if it keeps on coming and coming and coming?"

"There's always room for all that comes, somewhere," said Aunt Minty. "Well, I am sorry for those Grandmothers of yours who, of course, want you every single minute of your visit. But for myself, I'm delighted with Fritz's house party."

The telephone was busy that morning. Marjory talked with Granny, who was afraid of telephones, but who must hear Marjory's voice to be quite sure she was all right. Lissy talked with Grandma Beach. Susy talked with her mother, father, Jeanne, and Phil. And they all heard the baby's cooing "Susy" over the wire. Then Uncle

Ben talked with his bunch. And there was nothing to do, every one said, except to stay where they were and have as good a time as they could till the storm was over.

It wasn't hard to have a good time at Clover Patch. There was something for every one to do. The boys put on snow-shoes and helped Jake look after horses, cows, and chickens. Martha went along, but she had to be dug out of so many snow-banks that Martin soon brought her back. Lissy made gingerbread, singing as she did so.

"It's never good unless I do sing," she explained.

The babies kept Nancy busy. Margie and Betty sat by the fire, and Betty taught Marjory to knit. Betty, like her mother, was always knitting these days, warm, gray mufflers and sweaters for the soldiers over-

seas. Marjory decided to make a muffler for Roger's cousin, Dick. Aunt Minty and Effie and Anne were knitting, too.

After dinner, shut in by a white wall of snow, they all trooped into the great living-room and played all sorts of games. Fritz, of course, took part.

"Where in the world did that dog learn so many funny tricks?" cried Aunt Minty, as, tired out, they all dropped down to rest.

"In the circus—most of them," said Joe. And he told something of his own and Fritz's life in Marshall's Circus long before.

"Betty and I want to know," cried Marjory, when Joe's story was done, "what you meant last night, Aunt Minty, when you said, that Fritz had known David longer than he had any of the rest of us."

"They were babies together," said Aunt

Minty. "And Fritz always seems to remember it."

"But—how do you know, Aunt Minty?" cried Joe.

"Did Fritz know David even before he did Joe?" said Martha eagerly.

"Why bless my heart," cried Aunt Minty, gazing at the curious faces of Fritz's house party guests. "Don't you know anything about Fritz before he was a circus-dog?"

"Not one thing," said Joe.

"We've all tried so hard to find out," said Betty.

"Please, please tell us," cried Marjory.

"Every single thing you know," begged Lissy.

Before Aunt Minty could tell anything, however, Fritz who had been upstairs on some errand of his own, came down again,

and trotted quietly across the room. In his mouth was a small, battered book.

Anne and Effie, John, David, and Aunt Minty all laughed when Fritz brought the book proudly to Joe and laid it in his lap.

"What's this, old boy?" cried Joe.

"That dog always seems to understand what we talk about," said Aunt Minty. "Think of his bringing that book."

"It says, 'The Fritz Book,'" said Joe.

"'C. D. F.'" spelled Nancy, over Joe's shoulder. "What is that?"

"If you'll all sit down and Fritz will keep still a minute," said Aunt Minty, "I'll tell you. It's the litle book," she went on, when something like quiet reigned, "that my Clovers kept the year Fritz came to us—and David, too, for that matter."

"So Fritz really lived with you once?" said several voices.

"When he was a puppy, for a long time, off and on," said Aunt Minty.

"Off, most of the time," laughed John. "Wasn't he a runaway, though?"

"He ran away so often and came back with so many strange things," said little Anne, "that we made ourselves into a detective force to find out all we could about him."

"How interesting," cried Betty.

"The Clover Detective Force," said Effie, "C. D. F."

"The letters on the book," cried Nancy, tracing them with an eager finger.

"But did you find out?" said Marjory, hopping up and down in her excitement.

"Yes," laughed Anne. "And we found David, too."

"How mysterious," said Betty. "It sounds just like a story!"

"I can't wait to hear every single word of it," cried Marjory. "Do, every one, sit down and keep still, and let some one tell us all about it."

They all fairly tumbled into seats of some kind. But every one kept asking something, and every one else kept trying to answer. Fritz got terribly upset and barked till both babies awoke and cried, and had to be comforted and quieted. It was some time before every one was ready for the story.

"Who'll begin?" asked Joe, his hand on Fritz's collar to keep him still.

"Let's each tell something," said Effie. "John can tell what he remembers, then Anne, then David, then Aunt Minty, then I."

"I don't remember much—except as you tell me," said John. "I was just a kid, then."

"I don't remember anything," said David. "I wasn't any bigger than June, was I?"

"I remember it," said Effie, "but I can't tell it very well."

"Wait a minute," said Aunt Minty, smiling at Anne. "May I tell them your secret, Anne?"

"Why, yes, Aunt Minty, if you want to," said Anne, her pretty color coming and going.

"Listen, all of you," said Aunt Minty. "For a long time little Anne has written stories and verses for children's magazines."

"Just as I told them to my babies," explained Anne.

"And awhile ago," went on Aunt Minty, "she decided that she would write the story of Fritz when he was a puppy. She told me last night that 'twas all done, and that

she'd like to read it to me. Now, I suggest that after supper—"

Aunt Minty's voice was lost in the chorus of "Read it! Read it! Read it!" that went up from all sides. Fritz barked his warm approval.

"Yead it! Yead!" cried the Clover baby.

"Boof, boof, boof!" cried the June baby, crawling about on all fours, as much like Fritz as he could, while the old dog stopped barking to look on gravely.

"Please," trailed Betty's voice after the others.

"Why of course I'll read it," said Anne. "We'll have an early supper and a nice long evening."

It didn't take long to get supper with so many to help. And when it was all over, dishes washed, and babies in bed, the little group came again around the fireplace.

Anne sat by a little table with a big reading-lamp on it. Betty was on one side of her and Marjory on the other, both knitting. Roger was stretched out on the fur rug as close to Marjory as he could get. Joe wasn't far from Betty. The Marties, of course, were side by side on pillows, near Aunt Minty. John, Effie, and Nancy had chairs on the other side of the fireplace. David and Lissy and Susy were on the floor. Fritz curled up close to David.

"Of course, parts of this," Anne explained, "Aunt Minty and Effie and John have told me. But I've taken it all and put it into ten chapters just as much like a real book as I could. And I've made John and Effie and every one just as much like book-people as I could. And if I can, I'm going to have it published—my babies will like it, anyway."

"We'll all want copies,' said Joe. "I can use six this minute."

"I'll take a dozen," said Marjory.

"Wait till you've heard it," said Anne. She picked up the neatly typed pages.

Outside, the wind howled as if it would never leave off. The snow still drove against the windows. But inside, the fire crackled and burned red and warm. The lamp cast its soft rosy glow over all the eager little group. Fritz grunted sleepily. Once in awhile, when he heard his own name, he opened one eye, or thumped a drowsy tail on the floor. Aunt Minty's and Effie's needles clicked briskly. Betty's and Marjory's were always a little behind, and stopped entirely when the story was most interesting. And her cheeks rosy, little Anne read her story of

WHEN FRITZ WAS A PUPPY

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW BABY

FOR the third time, Aunt Minty put down her mending—a pair of small trousers that belonged to Johnny. For the third time she listened. She picked up the trousers. One, two, three neat stitches she set in the patch. Then she dropped the trousers to listen again. This time, after a minute, she sprang up, and still holding Johnny's trousers she went in search of the disturbing sound.

The sound was something like a faint, far-off wail. To Aunt Minty's ears, which always heard any sound of distress, it seemed like a baby's cry. The golden wind that stirred the golden branches of the great

elm beside the porch couldn't wail. It was too happy. It didn't seem that anything fortunate enough to be part of Aunt Minty's big beautiful home that radiant September morning could wail. But—Aunt Minty heard the sound again.

Of course, it wasn't Effie. Effie was in school. Anyway, she was too big and sensible a little person to wail about anything. There had been days when Effie had wailed—and with good reason. It was because she had been so unhappy and uncared for that Aunt Minty had taken her from a small bare attic in a crowded city and brought her to Clover Patch and made her her own little girl. That was a long time ago. Effie was ten and a half now, and couldn't remember any home besides Clover Patch.

It wasn't Johnny. Although Johnny had lived several years at Clover Patch, he did

wail sometimes, even yet. He had come with a batch of "fresh air" children. As he belonged to no one in particular, Aunt Minty's motherly heart and home had taken him in. Just now Johnny was in school—and more than usually happy because he was wearing his best trousers while his old ones were being patched.

All the time Aunt Minty was thinking of these things, she was trying, too, to make out where the sound came from.

"Down by the lilac bushes, most likely," she said to herself. "If it is another baby—well, then 'tis! I shouldn't mind. I'm sort of lonesome for a baby, now both my Clovers are in school."

Aunt Minty hurried along the sunshine-checkered path under the gold and scarlet maples toward the clump of lilacs down by the road.

Aunt Minty was round and rosy. She had white hair, but it was all full of waves, and couldn't make her look old. Her eyes were blue and twinkly. Her cheeks were pink and dimply. Her mouth was sweet and turned up at the corners. When she was alone she had a happy little habit of singing or talking to herself. Everybody loved Aunt Minty. They just couldn't help themselves.

Half-way down the great front yard, the broad tree-shaded path met a smaller one that dipped down a little hollow into a garden. It was the happiest little plot, full of old-fashioned posies, where butterflies and birds and bees and sunbeams and little folks all had good times together. On the steps which led into it stood a slender, dark-haired little girl, with great serious dark eyes.

"Aunt Minty," she said, "we came across lots from school, and we think we heard something crying somewhere. Johnny's looking in the barn. I've been through the garden. Don't you hear it?"

Aunt Minty nodded.

"It's down in the lilac bushes, I guess," she said. "Just as like as not, Effie, some one has heard of my baby farm up here at Clover Patch and left me another baby."

"Oh, oh!" cried Effie. "Wouldn't that be lovely, Aunt Minty?"

"Uh-huh," said Aunt Minty, hurrying along.

"I hope it will be a little tiny wee baby," said Effie, hurrying to keep up with Aunt Minty.

"Aint nothin' cryin' in the barn," cried Johnny, springing into view from some-

where—a habit of his to which Aunt Minty couldn't get used, somehow.

"Johnny Jump-Up," she cried. "Where did you come from? And wherever it was, did anybody there say 'ain't nothin'? Do I say it? Does Effie? Does your teacher? Does any one?"

"No one but me, I s'pose," said Johnny. "But there ain't—isn't—nothin'—anything —crying in the barn, Aunt Minty."

"There is down by the road," said Aunt Minty, "or my name isn't Araminta Clover."

"Sounds good," said Johnny, skipping along as close to Aunt Minty as he possibly could.

"What—sounds good?" said Aunt Minty, stopping at Johnny. "That wail?"

"No—your name, Aunt Minty," cried Johnny. "It sounds just like a pep-mint drop."

Effie's nose went up scornfully.

"Why Johnny Clover," she cried. "It's like out-of-doors, down by the brook, with the sun shining on the spearmint."

"That's pretty, Effie," said Aunt Minty. She gave Effie the special beaming smile that both her Clovers loved to get.

Johnny, sprinting on ahead, gave a sudden loud whoop and disappeared into the great clump of lilacs.

"There's—a basket! "he cried, tugging at something. "Don't touch it," called Aunt Minty, almost running. "You might spill out the baby. Wait, Johnny."

By this time, Effie, too, had disappeared into the clump of lilacs.

"It is, it is!" she cried. "It—wiggles! And it rattles."

"Rattles!" cried Aunt Minty. Quite out of breath, she came up with the children.

There, in the midst of the bushes, well-hidden by their green, was a good-sized basket of old-fashioned make. Its cover was tied firmly in place by stout cords.

Very carefully, Aunt Minty lifted it. It was heavy. There was an unmistakable wiggle inside, and a rattle, like a baby's rattle.

"We'll carry it right to the house," she said, as excited as Effie and Johnny. "No, I'll carry it alone—you run on ahead. John, see that there's wood in the stove. And push the tea-kettle over front, Effie."

Away flew the children across the broad yard. Aunt Minty went more slowly by the path, tugging the basket. All was still, now, inside it.

"Maybe it's cried itself to sleep—poor little dear," she said. "I don't care if 'tis another baby—I guess Clover Patch can

support another. I've never yet been sorry that I took Effie or Johnny. I hope this one is a boy—Johnny needs a brother."

As she crossed the sunny porch Aunt Minty's mind was already busy with a name for her new baby.

"There's a good fire," cried Johnny from the door.

"And the kettle's on," said Effie.

Into the big cheery kitchen went the three, the basket bobbing about between them. It bounced a little and rattled. But the baby didn't cry any more.

Effie ran for a pillow and blanket. Johnny brought the big shears to cut the stout cords. Aunt Minty set the basket on the table.

"Poor, frightened, little dear," she said.

She cut the cords. Two eager little faces

crowded as close as they could. Aunt Minty lifted the cover.

There was an eager little wail—half frightened, half joyful. Then into the center of the table sprawled a fat, awkward, brown and white bull-terrier puppy. He had a funny face—half dark, half white—which made him look fierce and good-natured at the same time. His eager nose wrinkled and sniffed. His big brown eyes went pleadingly from one to another of the surprised little group. He staggered on short unsteady legs across the table and crowded himself into Aunt Minty's arms.

"A—puppy!" cried Aunt Minty and Effie and Johnny all in one breath.

Effie reached out two eager little arms for the puppy. She cuddled him close to her.

"You dear little doggie," she said.

The puppy put out a clean pink tongue. He licked her arm. If a puppy could purr, this one would have tried it at this happy moment.

"Well, I'm beat!" cried Aunt Minty. "What on the face of the earth can I do with a dog-baby? I don't know anything about dogs." She looked helplessly at the bit of a dog in Effie's arms.

"I'll heat some milk," said Effie practically. "I suppose dog-babies are something like real babies, aren't they, Aunt Minty?"

Meanwhile the puppy crawled out of Effie's arms. He steered as straight a course as he could towards Johnny.

"Nice old fellow," cried Johnny. "Dogs like boys best. Just see him! He wants to come to me."

"What shall we name him?" asked Effie, as she brought milk from the ice-box and set it on the back of the stove to warm.

"Moses," said Johnny, "like that Bible baby who got put in some bushes."

Effie's scornful little nose showed what she thought of Moses for a name for the new puppy.

"Lilac would be sort of pretty," she said.

"Lilac Clover!" scoffed Johnny. "Sounds like a—a doll!"

"It's better than Moses," said Effie. "But—there's the milk. And it's just right. Set him down, Johnny, so he can eat. What name do you like, Aunt Minty?"

"Here's a rattle," said Aunt Minty, who had just remembered to look in the basket. "A real baby-rattle, with a red ribbon on the handle—it's been used. And here's a

collar—that's a brand new one. There's a name on it. You read it, Effie—I've left my glasses in the work-basket."

The puppy spattered milk on the clean floor in his efforts to eat it all at once. Johnny took the collar, and Effie tried to read it over his head.

"A big 'F'," she said.

"And a little 'r' and a little 'i'," said Johnny, twisting the collar.

"And a 't'—do hold it still, Johnny," said Effie. "And that last letter's 'z.' F-r-i-t-z" she spelled slowly.

"Fritz!" cried Aunt Minty. "His name's Fritz!"

"And that was you, Fritz," cried Betty, as Anne paused at the end of her chapter.

"That little bit of a brown and white puppy!"

Fritz rolled his sleepy eyes from one to

another of his house party guests. He knew they were talking about him.

"Do go on, Anne," begged Marjory. "I can't wait to know what happened next."

CHAPTER X

JOHNNY'S TROUSERS

THAT first night Fritz whined and cried just like a real baby. He wouldn't sleep in the pretty basket Effie fixed for him. Johnny said the basket was too fancy for a dog. So he brought in a box of straw from the barn. But the puppy wouldn't stay in that either. He wouldn't even try the cushion Aunt Minty brought for him. He just wanted to sit in somebody's lap. And even then he made sorry little sounds in his throat like sobs. And his eyes were big and sorry —Effie said they had tears in them.

Finally, long after their bedtime, the children went to bed. Aunt Minty straight-

ened up the table in the living-room and locked the doors. Fritz stumbled patiently along back of her, wherever she went. Every few steps, he tumbled over and whined to be picked up. When she went up-stairs, he went along. While she brushed out her hair, he sat in a disconsolate little heap at her feet.

"What shall I do with you, puppy?" she cried at last. "I wish you had been a real baby—I could take care of him."

Just then Fritz discovered Effie's long out-grown crib, which still stood in one corner of Aunt Minty's room. He jumped on it, nosed it over, turned around three times and a half, and with a deep sigh of satisfaction went off to sleep.

Then and there Fritz gave up whining. The next day he was as happy a puppy as any one ever saw. At the end of a month,

with good food, good care, plenty of play and exercise, plenty of petting, he just bubbled over with puppy-pranks. He went all over the place with Aunt Minty and the children. He loved the garden. He dug holes just for the fun of digging them. He took naps among the asters and bachelor buttons. He poked his little pink nose into every room in the house. He tore anything he could to shreds and ate as many of the shreds as he could. He hid things so you couldn't find them. When you gave up looking, sometimes, he'd bring them back, tail drooping, the dark side of his face grave, the bright side laughing at you, Effie said.

On the whole, he was as much at home in Clover Patch as if he'd always lived there. And where he had come from was just as much a puzzle to Aunt Minty and Effie

and Johnny as it had been the day he came. For all any one could find out about him, he might have dropped straight from the bright September sky into Aunt Minty's lilac bush.

"I'm surprised his folks don't want him," Aunt Minty said often.

Effie and Johnny lived in constant terror that some one would come and claim the puppy. They talked it over often with Jake. Jake was the farmer who lived with his wife in the pretty farmhouse up the road and took charge of Aunt Minty's big farm.

"He's one of them valuable dogs that can be taught to do almost anything, if you know how," Jake said. "Must be worth a sight of money. I think somebody's lost him."

But if somebody had, the "Ad's" in the store at Clover Corner, the post-office at

Morrisville, and the city daily, didn't find that somebody. For day after day, week after week, went by, and no owner came. To every one's joy, Fritz seemed to have become a member of Aunt Minty's family.

Everything went along beautifully at Clover Patch until October brought Columbus Day, and with it a little play at the Clover Corner school. Philip Cole was to be Ferdinand and wear a gilt crown which made the children call him "Old King Cole." Effie was to be Queen Isabella. She almost cried because Aunt Minty wouldn't let her have her ears pierced so she could wear some big earrings she found in a box in the attic. Johnny was greatly honored by being chosen for Columbus, himself. He was to sail in an over-turned table—the Pinta—flying a gorgeous red and yellow flag made out of some pieces of

cloth Aunt Minty had colored for a rug and hadn't cut up yet.

The trouble began at the breakfast table. Aunt Minty discovered that Johnny had on his best trousers instead of the old patched ones.

"John Thomas Clover," she said, her mouth as stern as so rosebuddy a mouth could be. "Why did you put on your new trousers for a school day?"

"It's a very special day, isn't it, Effie?" said Johnny.

Effie nodded.

"It's Columbus Day," she said. "But, Johnny, really and truly, your trousers won't show a mite when you discover America. You're to wear Miss Marvel's coat, you know, and it's long. You're coming to see us, aren't you, Aunt Minty?"

Aunt Minty nodded. Then she turned

to Johnny. Her eyes twinkled, but she spoke firmly.

"Before you discover America or anything else, John," she said, "go upstairs and discover your old trousers and get into them. Your new ones must stay new till after Thanksgiving, because something very special's going to happen then, that will take all the good clothes it owns."

"But, Aunt Minty," began Johnny.

"John," said Aunt Minty.

"There ain't no use," said Johnny. Then at the look in Aunt Minty's eyes, he blundered on "isn't no—isn't any—I mean, there isn't any use, Aunt Minty. 'Cause they aren't there—honest they aren't."

"Your trousers aren't in your room, John?"

"No, Aunt Minty." Johnny's face was

very red and his eyes looked straight into his dish of oatmeal. "I've looked."

"When?"

"This morning."

"They were last night, weren't they?"

"Yes, Aunt Minty."

"Who's been in your room since, except John Thomas Clover?"

"No one," said Johnny, adding "except Fritz."

"He might have run off with the trousers," said Effie anxiously.

"He might." Aunt Minty looked at Fritz on the floor beside Johnny's chair. The puppy looked back solemnly. She looked at Johnny who didn't look back at all. "Fritz has taken off as big things as your trousers, John."

"I didn't say he took them," cried Johnny. "I said they weren't in my room."

"I'll look," said Aunt Minty. "But there isn't time now before school. You will have to wear your best trousers to-day, John. But be careful of them. Trousers don't grow on bushes. Here's your lunch-box."

As Aunt Minty searched Johnny's room her face was puzzled and troubled, too. She had never known her boy to tell a lie. But she knew how he hated to wear the patched trousers. She thought of all the funny eager little reasons he'd given her for not wearing them.

"If he'd only asked me this time," she thought.

She thought, too, anxiously, of how Johnny hadn't much chance when he was a little boy to learn the right and wrong of things. His father and mother had both died when he was only a baby, and he had come up

"'If you took Effie's bonnet and hid it away like that, why not Johnny's trousers?'"

almost any way. All the farmers' wives in and near Clover Corner had shaken their heads at her for adopting a boy she knew so little about. "It won't turn out well—you'll see," some of them said even yet.

"It'll turn out better for Johnny than if he'd stayed on the streets of New York City, I guess," Aunt Minty said to herself, as she remembered the remark this morning.

All through her search, Fritz followed her. Now, he stuck a curious nose into the closet. From somewhere, he brought out Effie's given-up-for-lost sun-bonnet.

"Well, I'm beat," cried Aunt Minty. She dropped into a chair by the window, the sun-bonnet in her lap. Fritz stood up on his hind feet, put his paws on her knees, and looked at her gravely. "If you took Effie's bonnet and hid it away like that, why not Johnny's trousers?"

Just then, Aunt Minty happened to look out of the window into the scarlet maple that stood there. On a bright branch, just about on a level with her eyes, was a pair of small, patched trousers.

"If they were pitched out of the window, that's just about where they'd land," she said grimly.

With the handle of an umbrella she fished the trousers out of the tree. She spread them on Johnny's bed.

While she ate her dinner, changed her gown, and drove the old black horse to Clover Corner's schoolhouse, she didn't sing a note.

The play went off finely. King Ferdinand listened gravely to Columbus' pleadings. Queen Isabella showered him with all the jewels she could borrow. Columbus sailed away with his troublesome crew

across the dark waters of an unknown sea. When his scarlet coat blew back, as he paced the deck, Aunt Minty could see the best brown trousers.

Columbus landed on the shores of the western world. He greeted the surprised Indians with a cheery "Hullo!" He was just about to plant the Standard of Spain on the new soil, when poking open the unlatched door of the schoolroom, came an eager paw, a pink nose, a funny fierce puppy face, a wriggling body, and a tail with a joyous white tip. It was Fritz. In his mouth he held a pair of small patched trousers.

Straight to the kneeling Columbus he panted. In spite of the scarlet coat, he knew his master. He stood beside him on the strange new shores. And in front of him carefully he laid the trousers. Then,

tired out, but happy, the puppy stretched himself out for a nap under the proud old flag of Spain.

Every one but Aunt Minty and Johnny, himself, laughed. Johnny's face was a mixture of surprise and something that looked like guilt. Aunt Minty wanted to cry. He darted a quick look at her. "How did he get them?" the look said, though Johnny didn't know it.

Going home, after school, somehow the old buckboard managed to hold all Aunt Minty's family—even Fritz, who felt he'd walked far enough for one small puppy. Johnny was very quiet. So was Aunt Minty. Effie did the talking, helped out by Fritz.

Sitting alone that night, Aunt Minty mended a new rent in Johnny's old trousers.

"Of course 'twas a risk to take him," she

told the crackling wood fire. "But 'twould have been more of a risk to leave him where he was."

There was a step on the stairs—a sob at the door.

"Aunt Minty," said Johnny's voice.

"Yes, John," said Aunt Minty.

Johnny's face, flushed and wet, peered in at the door.

"Aunt Minty," he said, "I-I-I—"

"You want to tell me something, son?" said Aunt Minty. She opened her arms. Straight into them ran Johnny.

"I lost the trousers, myself," he sobbed. "It wasn't Fritz. I threw them out of the window. I just hate patches, Aunt Minty. They caught on the tree. I don't know how he found them."

"I know," said Aunt Minty. "I took them out of the tree and put them on your

bed. Fritz found them there, I suppose, and took them to you."

"Did he know I threw them out the window?" sobbed Johnny.

"No—but I did, John."

"Why didn't you say so?"

"I waited for you to tell me—I knew you would."

For a long time they talked. The fire burned low. The lump went out of Johnny's throat, the pain out of his heart.

"Oh, Aunt Minty," said Johnny as at last he said good night, "you aren't sorry you took me, are you?"

"Never," cried Aunt Minty.

Aunt Minty put more wood on the fire, and picked up her mending, humming softly. Higher and higher leaped the flames. Brighter and brighter they glowed.

But their warmth was nothing like the glow in Aunt Minty's heart.

"Aunt Minty," said Johnny's voice again at the stair door. His face looked through the opening at her. "How did you know I did it—put those trousers in the tree, I mean?"

"Fritz can do many things," said Aunt Minty, "but even he can't climb trees, Johnny!"

"And were you really and truly that funny little boy who didn't like patches?" cried Marjory at the end of the chapter. She gazed at John, so tall and big and strong, with such clear honest eyes.

"Gee," he said, his face so red every one laughed a little, "it doesn't seem so. But I guess I was. I'll always remember that day—every bit of it. How ashamed I felt

when Fritz brought me those old trousers. And I know every single word Aunt Minty said to me that night."

John came over to put his hand on Aunt Minty's shoulder. Aunt Minty smiled up at him.

"Just suppose you hadn't taken me?" he said, "whatever would have become of me?"

"Just suppose I hadn't," said Aunt Minty, "whatever would have become of me. I couldn't get along without my oldest son, John!"

CHAPTER XI

FRITZ MEETS AN ENEMY

"IF only Fritz could go," said Effie for the dozenth time.

It was the morning of the day before Thanksgiving—the most beautiful Indian Summer day. It seemed just as if summer had decided to stay over and see for herself just how the year kept its Thanksgiving.

Aunt Minty and Effie were packing two suit-cases. On the bed, all ready to put on, were Johnny's best suit and Effie's best gown. On a chair was Johnny's new overcoat and cap. On another was Effie's coat and hat.

The Clovers were going to Uncle Gem's

for Thanksgiving. Uncle Gem lived miles away—or so it seemed to the excited little folks.

First, there was the ride to Morrisville at the foot of the hill where you took the train. Then there was the railroad journey, short but interesting. At the end of that, Uncle Gem would meet them and take them to his farmhouse.

If it hadn't been for just one thing, the Clover Patch would have been the thankfulest place anywhere around. The one thing was—Fritz couldn't go.

"Kate doesn't like dogs," Aunt Minty explained for the dozenth time. "She always has cats—beautiful cats. And what with four or five of them, and the Twins, Minty and Gem, and the new baby, and you two, I guess the house will be full enough and noisy enough without Fritz."

"I don't see how any one can help liking dogs," said Effie.

Dinner was over at last. The suit-cases were stuffed, locked, and strapped. Jake harnessed the horses to the two-seated carriage. Everybody climbed in—but Fritz. If only it hadn't been for the frantic yelps and howls that came from the barn where he was tied!

"He'll get over it," said Aunt Minty. "Just as soon as Jake gets back he's going to untie him and take him to his house and give him an extra good supper. We just couldn't take him—that's all."

In the excitement of unloading at the station, and of watching the crowds of people all going somewhere to have a good time, every one forgot Fritz. Jake drove away. The train was late. Just as its great eye came peering around the curve,

and its hoarse voice whistled, something cold and wet poked itself into Effie's hand. Close beside her there was a tired little "Woof!" And there, a piece of rope dangling from his collar, was Fritz himself.

"What shall we do with him?" cried Aunt Minty.

There wasn't time to do anything. The brakeman was already shouting "All aboard!" People crowded before and behind them. Effie, with Fritz in her arms, was set on the train platform.

"Dog in the baggage-car, Madam," said the brakeman, as he helped Aunt Minty and Johnny aboard.

Fritz was tired. He'd had a long struggle with the rope to break it, and a long run. As soon as he found a comfortable seat in the train beside Johnny, he curled

himself up into as small a ball as he could and went to sleep.

Every coach on the long train was crowded. When the conductor reached their seats, they had so short a way to go, he said there was no use moving the puppy now. So all the way to Keen Fritz dozed happily on the red plush cushion.

"Whatever Kate will say, I don't know," said Aunt Minty. "A dog—and she can't bear dogs!"

"Maybe she'll like him," said Effie hopefully. "Fritz isn't like other dogs."

"No," said Aunt Minty laughing. "He isn't. He's going to make something quite unusual when he grows up, if he keeps on as he's begun."

Fritz opened one eye and looked at her. Effie said he winked.

"Why, Uncle Gem's got a new nau-ter-

mo-bul," cried Johnny, when the train drew up at the little station of Keen. "I never saw but one before. One went by the schoolhouse one day—"

"The same day Fritz came," cried Effie almost as much excited as Johnny, at sight of the shining new car, with Uncle Gem sitting proudly at the wheel.

Uncle Gem helped them all in. He laughed when he saw the puppy and heard how he had followed them. He seemed to think it was a great joke on his wife. All the way home, when he wasn't talking about his new car, he talked about what she would say when Fritz jumped out.

Fritz enjoyed his ride. He wasn't a bit afraid. He sat up, stiff and straight, between Uncle Gem and Johnny.

"Acts as if he'd been in cars all his life," said Uncle Gem.

Soon the car flashed up the drive to Uncle Gem's house. There on the porch stood Aunt Kate with the new baby in her arms. On each side of her was a Twin. And each Twin held a big gray cat.

Aunt Minty and Effie and Johnny, with Fritz in his arms, ran up the steps. Aunt Minty reached for the baby. Like all babies he gurgled with delight at sight of her pink dimply face and laughing eyes. Everybody tried to say how glad everybody was to see everybody. Fritz decided he'd take part. He leaped to the ground. He wagged a delighted tail. He sidled up toward the cats.

"Woof!" he said in his friendliest fashion.

"A dog!" cried Aunt Kate, catching sight of him for the first time. She threw up her hands in horror. It was a good thing Aunt Minty had the new baby.

"The jolliest little puppy," said Uncle Gem, while Aunt Minty's anxious voice tried to explain Fritz's being there.

"Pst-st-st!" said one of the cats, who all this time, had been getting his tail and back to the size so impudent a visitor as Fritz required.

"Pst-st-st!" with a few more "sts," said the other cat. He was one big fluff of angry fur, and his eyes were like great golden coals.

Then—there was a leap of cats—a chorus of growls and howls, some loud yelps and more "Pst-st-sts!" Next—a streak of brown and white puppy crossed the moonlit space of the lawn and disappeared toward the barn. It was followed by a streak of gray cat—two streaks of gray cat—and four other streaks that were Effie and Johnny, little Gem and little Minty. Back on the

porch Aunt Kate screamed, Uncle Gem laughed, Aunt Minty still explained, and the baby gurgled.

"They'll kill him!" cried Aunt Kate.

They didn't kill him, of course. But probably in all the world of puppies, there was never one more thoroughly frightened.

Up to this time in his life, Fritz had always met friends. It was a great surprise to him that there were those in his little world who didn't like him. When he had more time, Fritz meant to sit down and think it all out. But just now, he had all he could do to keep ahead of those two fierce, sleek beasties who came so softly, yet with such wonderful swiftness, behind him. As fast as his four frightened legs would let him, he ran. He saw a friendly opening. He dashed through it. He saw some stairs. He tore up them.

Panting, he came into a big, quiet, sweet-smelling place, turned, and found himself face to face with a big black and white cat. She was washing her paws and making a soft buzzing sound in her throat. Fritz whined plaintively. He couldn't go back to those furies below. This one, who looked like them, might as well do her worst. But to his surprise this sleek handsome creature didn't turn into a noisy whirlwind of fur at sight of him.

"Mew?" she said, arching her back prettily. It was the sweetest sound a frightened puppy ever heard.

"Woof?" he questioned her, half under his breath.

She came slowly toward him. She sniffed him, satisfied, stuck out a pink tongue, and licked his cropped ear.

Five minutes later, four children hurried

up the stairs. They had caught and carried back to the house two justly angry gray pussy-cats. In the hay-loft, near the window, they found Fritz. He was lapping hungrily from a saucer of milk. Near by, looking on amiably, was a black and white cat.

When the milk gave out, Fritz curled down beside her. She licked his face, purring loudly and blinking up at the children, as if she was asking, "What new sort of kitten is this?"

The children knelt down beside the happy family. Effie and Johnny petted the friendly pussy till she purred louder than ever. Gem and Minty went wild over the puppy.

"We'll let him stay right here," said little Minty eagerly. "You see Nellie-cat had four lovely kittens and Mother's given them

away. She's lonesome and Fritz is lonesome, too."

Even Aunt Kate laughed when she heard that Nellie-cat had adopted the puppy. She and the baby, too, went with Uncle Gem and Aunt Minty and the children to see the dog and cat together in the hay-loft. Both had a good supper and both went off to sleep in the happiest fashion, although for awhile Fritz had bad dreams in which great gray cats with golden eyes took active part.

In spite of the fact that he hadn't been invited, in spite of his bad beginning, Fritz had the best time that Thanksgiving morning. He made up his mind he didn't like cats, anyhow, unless they were black and white and motherly, with soothing buzzy sounds in their throats. Children were so much better. And chickens were made

just to chase about. There was an old horse who liked to have him around. And best of all, there were cows. Fritz loved them, at once, and the rich warm milk.

"He's a fine little chap," Uncle Gem said, when he and the children went to the house to get ready for Thanksgiving dinner. Fritz and Nellie were left sunning themselves on the barn floor. "I'd like him myself if it wasn't for Kate and her cats. Only trouble with that breed of dog is they're almost always runaways. No matter how good a home they have, they will rove."

That was the best Thanksgiving dinner any one ever had. At the end, with the ice cream, came some delicious little cakes, with letters on the icing. There was a green "E" for Effie and a pink "J" for Johnny. Effie and Johnny had just telegraphed each

other that they'd save their cakes for Fritz and Nellie, who wouldn't mind if the letters didn't fit, when Aunt Kate smiled at them and dropped a little cake with a yellow "F" on it on Johnny's plate.

"For Fritz?" cried Johnny.

Aunt Kate nodded.

"Nellie doesn't eat cake," she said.

Effie and Johnny and the Twins ran all the way to the barn to give Fritz his Thanksgiving cake. But he wasn't there. Nellie was sound asleep in the hay-loft. But Fritz wasn't anywhere, though they spent all the rest of the short, bright afternoon searching and calling.

"He'll be around at milking time," said Uncle Gem. But he wasn't. And when the children went to bed, he hadn't come. Effie slept in a big bed with Aunt Minty. Johnny had a little room just off theirs,

which had a window over the porch roof.

Maybe because the moon was so bright, maybe because he'd eaten so many unusual things, maybe because he was anxious about Fritz, for a long time, Johnny couldn't go to sleep. When he did he was awakened suddenly by a sharp tinkly little sound somewhere out of doors. He hopped out of bed and looked out of the window. He could hear voices down stairs. It was still night—not morning as he had thought.

Another sharp buzzing little tinkle—it was a bicycle bell. Johnny could hear the whiz of the bicycle coming down the road.

He climbed out on the roof. Past the yard, along the moonlit road, flew a wheel. On it was a girl in red. In front of her, on the wheel, was fastened a deep round basket. And sitting in the basket, his head half turned toward Johnny, was a dog.

Johnny could see his face, half dark, half bright. He could see his cropped ears. He could see the red bow little Minty had tied on his collar.

"Fritz!" cried Johnny. He nearly tumbled off the roof in his surprise and joy.

"Fritz!" he cried again. He caught an apple-tree branch and leaned far out—as far as he could.

He was sure he heard a faint little answering "Woof!" as the wheel coasted down the long hill below the farm. He shinned down the apple-tree as fast as he could. But before he reached the ground, the bicycle was quite out of sight.

He tore across the porch and dashed into the living-room bright with firelight and lamplight. Aunt Minty, Aunt Kate, and Uncle Gem were visiting before the fire.

The clock was just striking nine. Johnny rubbed his eyes.

"I saw Fritz," he cried. "He was in a little tall basket on a wheel. And there was a girl, all red, riding the wheel. The bell rang."

Every one laughed.

Uncle Gem took Johnny up in his lap.

"Too much Thanksgiving turkey, my boy," he said.

"Just a dream, Johnny Jump-Up," said Aunt Minty gently. "Put him down, Gem. He must run right back to bed. Fritz'll probably be here when he wakes up in the morning."

"But what a funny dream," cried Susy when this chapter ended.

"I don't think 'twas a dream," said Marjory.

"Neither do I," said Martin.

"Was it?" cried Martha. "Was it a dream, John?"

"Don't dare spoil my story by telling, Johnny," warned little Anne laughing.

"Gee, Anne," said Johnny. "Seems to me your story is all about me and the foolish things I did."

"Wait and see," said Anne, reaching for the next chapter.

CHAPTER XII

LITTLE ANNE COMES TO CLOVER PATCH

NEXT morning, Fritz hadn't come. The Clovers had to go home without him. All the way on the train, Effie and Johnny watched for him. At Morrisville, they expected to find him with Jake. But he wasn't there, and Jake didn't know anything about him.

Without Fritz Clover Patch was as empty as so lovely a place could possibly be. You wouldn't think anything so small as a puppy could take up so much room in a house—and in every one's heart, as well.

But Christmas was coming. And somehow Christmas has a cheery way of setting you at work, and keeping you so busy you

can't be too lonely—even if you are a little Clover and have lost the best puppy any one ever had.

At school, Effie and Johnny were getting ready for a wonderful Christmas Tree. And at home, they helped Aunt Minty get ready for what she called her "Christmas Babies." Aunt Minty had a way all her own of finding out about babies that weren't well or happy, and of making things better for them. And she had a way, too, of making every one want to help her. This year, all Clover Corners was knitting and crocheting and sewing and saving pennies, nickels, and dimes, so that twelve babies in Morrisville might have a Merry Christmas.

One afternoon, about two weeks before Christmas, Aunt Minty, busy with a paper, pencil, and what she called her Santa Claus

purse, looked up with a smile, as the Clovers burst into the room, filling it with late sunshine, frosty breeze, and eager excited news.

"There's a new teacher," began Effie, flinging her books in one chair and herself in another.

"Miss Marvel's gone home 'cause her mother's sick, and she can't come back, and I'm glad and sorry both together inside of me," Johnny went on with the story, when Effie paused for breath. "And we've got a Miss Anne—she's so little she says we can call her by her first name with a Miss before it, doesn't she, Effie?"

"Five dollars more would do it," said Aunt Minty, smiling absently at the excited children, " with what I'll have left."

"I just love her," cried Effie. "But she's got the sorriest eyes, Aunt Minty."

"Guess yours would be sorry, Effie Clo-

ver," cried tender-hearted Johnny, "if your father was dead and everybody, and you'd been sent somewhere and they didn't want you, and the ship went down and everybody was drowned! Wouldn't they, Aunt Minty? Wouldn't Effie's eyes be big and sorry-looking?"

"What is the boy talking about?" cried Aunt Minty, really hearing for the first time. "Do tell me, Effie, so I can understand. Who's been drowned?"

"Well," said Effie, "I don't exactly know myself. But Nora Cole told me—she's staying there—"

"Who's staying where?" said Aunt Minty, folding up her paper and putting it into the Santa Claus purse.

"Miss Anne—our teacher—is staying at Nora Cole's, 'cause it's the trustee's, till she can find another boarding place. Nora says

she didn't have any one of her own, anyway, but just her father, and he died. So she came to New York, from Liverpool, or somewhere, to a cousin's—or somebody's. And the ship went down. But she was picked up and brought along on another. And then, when she did get to New York, her cousins didn't want her—nobody seems to. Nora says her mother says she can't board a teacher. And where Miss Marvel boarded they won't take her. But I should think anybody'd just love to have her. Anyhow, she's learned how to teach school."

"She's going to teach us right along," said Johnny. "And I ain't going to say 'ain't' any more. Honest, I ain't!" he added, as they both laughed.

"I'm sorry I can't have blue eyes," said Effie. "Miss Anne has blue eyes."

"Blue eyes wouldn't look very well in your face, Effie," said Aunt Minty.

"But please may I wear my next-to-the-best hair-bows to-morrow?" went on Effie anxiously. "Miss Anne says we must all look just as neat as we can."

From that day on, almost all of Effie's and Johnny's talk was of Miss Anne. Aunt Minty was so taken up with her list of Christmas babies on which a brand new one had just been entered, that she didn't take her usual interest in what they said. She heard of it, of course, but as she said afterward, "It went in one ear, and out the other."

Then there came a stormy evening about a week before Christmas. The snow and wind were both out trimming the world in white for the great holiday. Once in

awhile, the moon looked down to see that everything was done just right.

"Children," said Aunt Minty. She shut the empty Santa Claus purse with a sharp click. "Sit down here by the fire and tell me, or Santa—just as you like—the one thing you want most for Christmas."

Effie laughed softly, but Johnny looked sober. They came and sat down, one on each side of Aunt Minty. Aunt Minty picked up a baby jacket she was crocheting out of rosy wool.

"Johnny first," she said, smiling at his eager eyes.

"Santa Claus knows what I want," he said. "I told him, 'cause you were so busy, Aunt Minty. But it might be well to tell him again."

He leaned toward the blazing fire on its way up the chimney.

"Please, Santa Claus," he said, "I want a Fritz-dog, like the one I lost."

Aunt Minty dropped a stitch in her surprise. She had almost forgotten Fritz.

"What if Santa should be out of dogs?" she said.

"Santa has everything," said Johnny firmly. "But it isn't just a dog I want, it's a Fritz-dog."

"Don't set your heart on it, Johnny Jump-Up," said Aunt Minty. "I'm afraid you won't get it. It's your turn, now, Effie. Do ask for something sensible, dear."

Effie's cheeks flamed a sudden soft red.

"There's something I want just dreadfully, Aunt Minty," she said, "but it's you and not Santa Claus who can give it to me. It's—I—oh, please, Aunt Minty, may I ask Miss Anne to come here for the Christmas vacation? She was going to stay at Nora's,

though Nora's mother didn't want her. But now, Nora's grandpa and grandma are coming from out west. And there won't be room for Miss Anne. Nobody wants to take her at Christmas."

"Home's the best place to spend Christmas, dearie," said Aunt Minty.

"But if you haven't any," said Effie, "you can't spend it there. Miss Anne's cousins in New York don't want her. Nora saw her crying over a letter from them the other day, and she just knows they told her so. Besides, she hasn't earned enough money so she can go, yet. Couldn't we ask her? There's such lots and lots of room in this lovely old Clover Patch."

"Effie," said Aunt Minty quietly, "would you rather have Miss Anne for the Christmas vacation or a new muff?"

Effie caught her breath.

"Like Nora's?" she said.

"I think Santa rather expected to bring you one," said Aunt Minty. "But if you'd rather have Miss Anne for the visit, I can arrange it with him."

"Oh dear," said Effie, "what made you ask me, Aunt Minty?"

"You are the only one who can decide, dear," said Aunt Minty. "Think it over until to-morrow before you go to school. I'm going to town in the afternoon to see if I can't raise enough extra money for some Christmas dinners for my Christmas babies' families. There's a muff at Brown's, like Nora's."

It was a little whisper that Aunt Minty heard from Effie, next morning, just as she was starting for school.

"I need a muff so much, Aunt Minty," she said. "It's going to be a long, hard winter, Jake says."

"Your old one's warm enough yet," suggested Aunt Minty.

"I thought I'd give that to some poor little girl who hasn't any," said Effie.

"Very well, dear," said Aunt Minty, "a little sister of one of my Christmas babies is just your age. She'd like it."

Effie went after Johnny, who was calling her from the road. But she didn't run.

Aunt Minty was just sitting down to an early dinner when the door burst open. In flew Effie. Her cheeks were as red as her cap. Her eyes were bright and excited.

"I won't take the muff, Aunt Minty," she cried. "I left my lunch and ran all the way home, so as to get here before you started to town. I'd rather have Miss Anne. May I ask her this afternoon?"

"Yes, dearie," said Aunt Minty with one of her beamiest smiles. "And I'll ask her

too. I'm going to stop at the school this afternoon, to see if she would be willing to charge ten cents admission to your Christmas Tree and turn in the proceeds towards those Christmas babies."

That night, when Aunt Minty drove from Morrisville, Effie met her at the gate.

"Didn't you like Miss Anne, Aunt Minty?" she cried, as she climbed into the sleigh. "Didn't you just love her?"

"She's too little to teach school," said Aunt Minty. "And she looks starved."

"She's so happy," said Effie, "just thinking that she's coming to Clover Patch. She thinks you're an angel—she said so."

"A rather plump angel," laughed Aunt Minty, as she and Effie hurried to the house. "Well, with the proceeds from your Christmas Tree, and what I raised to-day,

I'll have enough for those Christmas dinners, so that's off my mind."

The Clover Corner Christmas Tree was held on the afternoon of the twenty-third of December. That night little Miss Anne came home with Effie and Johnny. She was a pale, quiet, little person, with big sorry eyes and hair that would curl around her ears, in spite of all she did to stop it. It made her look just like a little girl, instead of a really truly school-ma'am. Almost at once, she found things to do for Aunt Minty. She tied up toys and jackets and booties for the Christmas babies. She helped fill baskets with groceries and fruit and candy. She seemed to like to be busy.

The next afternoon, Aunt Minty and Effie and Johnny and Miss Anne, and all those bundles and baskets, somehow got themselves into the big sleigh. With Jake to

drive, away they went to Morrisville. How the sunbeams flashed on the snow. How the sleighbells jingled! At each of the thirteen houses on the list Effie and Johnny left a big basket and some bundles tied with bright ribbon, and a jolly Christmas card.

When the last one was left, the great red sun was setting back of a tall slender church-spire. The busy street leading toward it looked like a frosty Christmas postcard.

Even the horses seemed to know it was Christmas Eve. They pranced up the hills like young colts. When they turned into the yard old Clover Patch stood, dark and quiet, against the snow-covered hills and crimson sky. High over its roof sparkled one star.

"Oh, it's so lovely to be coming home—and have it Christmas Eve—and the babies

and every one happy—and everything!" cried Effie.

Her voice trembled with joy inside of her which must somehow get out, and yet couldn't find quite the right words.

"It's—heavenly!" cried Miss Anne suddenly. "Oh, Miss Clover, how I wish I was a baby! Then maybe you'd adopt me!"

When that little speech was out, Miss Anne was frightened to think of what she'd said.

Aunt Minty was just getting out of the sleigh. On the ground, she turned to look at Miss Anne. It was almost as if she'd never really seen her before.

"You poor homesick child," she cried, reaching up both arms to Miss Anne. "Here my stupid old head's been so full of those blessed babies—and you needing me even more, maybe!"

"It's so homey here," sobbed Anne from the shelter of Aunt Minty's arms. "If I help you out of school, couldn't I stay here —just till June?"

"Let me think, dear," said Aunt Minty. "We'll see. It's your home till after New Year's anyway—thanks to Effie. "She reached out a hand to Effie, and with Johnny clinging to Effie they started toward the house.

"Boof! Boof! Boof!" across the Christmas stillness came a glad bark. There was a mad rush, a scramble, Johnny was lying on his back in the soft snow. There sitting a-top him, thumping him with big good-natured paws, was a brown and white puppy.

"Where did he come from?" cried Effie.

"Santa Claus, of course," said Johnny, scrambling to his feet, and clutching wildly

for Fritz. "See that Christmas ribbon on his collar."

With Fritz in every one's way, with every one trying to get hold of him, somehow, they all got into the kitchen. And when Aunt Minty had lighted the lamps, every one could see the bit of holly ribbon tied to the dog's collar.

Just then, Jake came in from the barn. In the palm of one big brown hand, he held a small pink baby shoe.

"That puppy dropped this, I guess," he said slowly. "I found it out there in the road by the barn door. He must have brought it along from wherever he's been. He always did like shoes."

"Well, I'm beat," cried Aunt Minty. She sat down in the big rocking-chair, the little pink shoe in her hand.

"Probably Santa meant that for some

baby somewhere," suggested Johnny. He was already heating a big saucer of milk for Fritz. "Anyway, I'm glad he remembered to bring me my dog."

"Do you really like it as much as you seem to?" asked Anne, pausing at the end of this chapter to look at the absorbed faces all about her.

"It's splendid," said Nancy Spindle.

"Great," said Joe.

"I just love that about the baby shoe," said Lissy. "But I can't think where he found it, can you, Margie?"

"Not yet," said Marjory. "But please don't stop, Anne, go on."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FRITZ BOOK

OF course every one had to hang up a stocking. Johnny lent Fritz one of his. Johnny himself didn't really expect anything more, because Santa Claus had sent him the puppy. But it was well to be prepared if anything else should come his way. So he hung his stocking between the puppy's and Effie's. Next came Anne's and Aunt Minty's.

Next morning Aunt Minty was in the midst of a troubled dream. She had adopted thirteen Christmas babies all at once, and hadn't names enough to go around. Then "Boof! Woof!" sounded cheerily in

her ears, and there was Fritz poking a cold nose into her face, and saying, "Merry Christmas!" just as well as he could.

She left him to awaken the other Clovers, and hurried down stairs to start a roaring blaze in the fireplace. It wasn't long before they all trooped in. Miss Anne, with tumbled hair down her back, looked as much like a little girl as Effie did.

And those five flat uninteresting stockings by some Santa Claus magic had turned into queer-shaped, interesting objects that didn't look like stockings at all. Some were still slim-legged, but had plumped-out feet. Some seemed to have no feet, but well-rounded legs. All showed fascinating bunches and bulges and curves and corners. So before breakfast, or any such everyday thing could be thought of, they had to be taken down and emptied with delightful

rustles and rattles of paper and giggles and squeals and "Ohs" and "Ahs" and "Looks" and "Sees" on the part of the Clovers themselves.

"I didn't know that Santa Claus could knit and sew so well," said Aunt Minty. She wore a new white apron and a warm, woolly lavender jacket. Out of the toe of her stocking she had just brought a gay green and red holder.

"He didn't make the holder," said Johnny. "Effie did, for me to give to you, Aunt Minty."

"And Mrs. Jake helped me quite a good deal with the jacket," explained Effie.

"I like them all the better for that, children," said Aunt Minty.

She smiled as she looked at her little Clovers. Johnny had on the coat of his new "grown-up" suit. His new tie flamed

under one ear. Effie was reading a book, her stiff bronze shoes already on, stretched out stiff and straight before her. Anne was attired in a cap and scarf of rose-colored wool.

"Santa Claus knew what I needed," she said. "How warm and cozy these will be to wear to school all winter."

"Your Christmas visit here is Aunt Minty's gift to me," said Effie, closing her book. "And it's my gift to you, Miss Anne. It wouldn't go in your stocking."

"It goes in my heart," cried Miss Anne. "I just couldn't bear to think Christmas was coming. And all the time it was bringing me such lovely gifts. It's good to be a Clover—Aunt Minty."

As Anne tried the name Aunt Minty had told her to use, she drew a long, quick breath.

Aunt Minty put one arm around the little teacher.

"You may be a Clover till June, dear," she said. "That's my Christmas gift to you."

Rosy cap and all, Anne hid her face on Aunt Minty's comfortable shoulder.

"I'm so happy," she sobbed.

"Well, I wouldn't cry about being happy," cried Johnny, greatly upset.

"Oh Aunt Minty," cried Effie getting hold of Aunt Minty's free hand, and reaching for Anne's. "There are three of us now, so we are your three-leaf clover, aren't we? One, two, three, Miss Anne, Johnny, and me!"

Every one laughed at Effie's happy little discovery, even Miss Anne through her tears. The three Clovers hugged Aunt Minty. Fritz felt left out. He went to his Christmas stocking, which lay on the

floor. He nosed it and poked it about. Finally, out of it he brought the pink baby-shoe. Proudly, he brought this to Aunt Minty and dropped it in her lap.

"He's giving you a Christmas present," laughed Effie.

"I wish he'd bring me the baby that belongs in it," said Aunt Minty.

Perhaps nowhere on this great holly-trimmed, candle-lighted earth, was there a merrier Christmas than at Clover Patch. It takes love and good will to make really happy Christmases, you know. And the old house just brimmed over with these beautiful Christmas gifts.

About noon, little snowflakes began to tap lightly against the windows. Faster and faster they came. Effie said the snowflakes on earth were giving a Christmas party and asking all those in the clouds to come.

Next morning, the beautiful white merry-making was still going on. The wind came, too, and chased the snowflakes in great white crowds before him.

The next two days were the stormiest even Aunt Minty could remember. They were days when Jake had to come from the farm-house to Clover Patch on snowshoes, when shoveling paths was of little use, when some-one was busy most of time keeping fires blazing. But to little Miss Anne they were the happiest days she had known in a long, long time.

She told the children quaint English folk stories and showed them how to play Eng-lish games with delightful dances in them. She found the old piano, shut up in one corner of the living-room. No one had dreamed what gay little tunes were hidden away in its heart till her fingers on the keys

set them free. And in all the songs and games and dances, Fritz took part. Of course, he made up his own dance-steps. And his voice wasn't very musical when he tried to sing, but no one minded.

On the evening of the third day of the storm, Effie discovered one star looking down in surprise at Clover Patch almost buried in snowdrifts. The wind went to sleep. The snowflakes, missing their playfellows, fell more and more slowly. In the living room the great fire blazed out. Its warmth and color and fragrance and cheery crackle drew the Clover Bunch about it.

Fritz climbed into Miss Anne's lap and cuddled down to sleep, the baby-shoe in his mouth.

"Where do you suppose he found it?" Effie asked for the dozenth time, at least.

"Some dear little baby wore it," said Anne

dreamily. She drew the shoe carefully away from Fritz, and held it gently in her hand. "I can see just how the little foot looked inside it, can't you?"

"If Fritz only could talk," said Effie, "and tell us all about it."

Suddenly, into Anne's head came a big new thought.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," she cried. "Let's make ourselves into a detective force to find out about Fritz—where he came from to begin with—where he goes to when he runs away—everything we can. What have we to begin with—clues, you know?"

After all these new words had been fully explained to Effie and Johnny, they were wild to begin it at once.

"The Clover Detective Force—C. D. F.," said Effie slowly. "It sounds very big and important."

Aunt Minty promised to help look up clues. Anne brought from her room a little notebook one of the children had given her at Christmas. It was tied with bright red ribbon. On the cover she printed "The Fritz Book." Inside she wrote down the clues, numbering each. When they were all in, they looked like this:

1 Old-fashioned basket, with stout cord.
2 New collar, marked FRITZ.
3 Baby's rattle with pink ribbon on handle.
4 When Fritz came back at Christmas, he brought with him a pink baby-shoe, not much worn, except where Fritz has chewed it.

Note: Wherever Fritz comes from, there must be a baby there.

(signed) C. D. F.

"That's all, so far, isn't it?" asked Miss Anne, as she finished reading her clues to the other members of the Clover Detective Force.

"There's the girl on the wheel," said Johnny.

"What girl?" cried Anne. "You haven't told me about her, Johnny."

"That was Johnny's dream," said Aunt Minty. "He climbed out on the roof in his sleep—"

"Thanksgiving night at Uncle Gem's," said Johnny, too excited to know that he was interrupting. "But I wasn't asleep, Aunt Minty, so how could it be a dream? There was a real live girl, all red, riding by on a wheel, and she had Fritz in a basket in front of her. Put it down, please, Miss Anne."

Smiling at Aunt Minty, Anne added to the clues in The Fritz Book:

5 Girl in red on bicycle; basket in front of her with Fritz inside. Seen by John Thomas Clover on Thanksgiving night at Uncle Gem Clover's farm.

"And I do think, Miss Anne," said Johnny after this was all written, "there ought to be something about Santa Claus bringing him back to me."

Everyone but Johnny laughed now. But Miss Anne wrote a sixth clue in the little book:

6 Fritz was brought back at Christmas by Santa Claus, with Christmas ribbon on his collar.

She'd just finished writing this, when the telephone bell over the desk rang sharply.

The telephone was so new a thing to them all that every one wanted to answer. But Effie was finally allowed to.

A man spoke so distinctly that Aunt Minty, Miss Anne, and Johnny all heard it.

"Is this Miss Dolly Miller's residence?" said the voice.

Some one besides Aunt Minty, Miss Anne,

Johnny, and Effie at the receiver, heard too. Fritz, asleep on his cushion in a chair below the phone, suddenly sat up, cocked one cropped ear, and listened.

"This is Clover Patch—Miss Araminta Clover's residence," said Effie, in her best telephone manner.

Perhaps the man didn't hear. Anyway, he didn't answer, or if he did, Effie didn't hear. Several voices spoke in a confused way. A man's voice seemed to be talking about a dog. "I can't hear," said Effie anxiously. Then a girl's voice, brisk and clear, said, "Two days before Christmas." Then it mixed itself up with other voices talking about the terrible storm and a lost Christmas package. But one more word in the man's voice came over the wire and sounded distinctly through the room. That one word was "Fritz!"

Fritz stood up on his hind feet, his paws on the back of the chair. He quivered with joy from the tip of his nose, lifted toward the phone, to the tip of his tail. Johnny sprang after him, as if he feared the puppy would disappear utterly into the telephone receiver.

"'His master's voice,'" Anne quoted laughing.

After that one word, "Fritz!" the voice trailed away into distance, and was lost in the buzzing of the wires. And try as they would again and again all the evening, they couldn't get connection with it or with much of anything.

"The storm has crossed the wires," explained Aunt Minty to the eager group of Clovers, after she had held an unsatisfactory talk with Central. "Central doesn't know who the man was, or if he really

wanted us, or anything else about it. If he does, he'll try again."

But although Fritz sat under the telephone waiting for the voice till he fell asleep, the voice didn't call again.

So all there was of it, so far as the Clover Detective Force was concerned, was another little entry in The Fritz Book:

7 Man's voice on the telephone. Asked for Miss Dolly Miller. Said something about a lost dog and Fritz. Fritz knew the voice.

"And here it is all set down in Anne's pretty, prim schoolma'am writing," said Nancy, looking at The Fritz Book. During the last part of this chapter of little Anne's story The Fritz Book had been passed quietly from one to another of the listening group, so that all might see the clues for themselves.

It's just ten years ago," said Effie. "See the date's 1904."

"There hasn't been such a storm since, seems to me," said Aunt Minty, "until this one."

"Isn't the voice over the 'phone just thrilling?" said Susy.

"I'd like to make a picture of Fritz when he heard it," said Roger.

"Would you know the voice if you heard it again, Effie?" asked Lissy.

"I think so," laughed Effie. "Would you, Anne?"

"I'd like to hear it this minute," said Anne.

"*Have* you ever heard it again?" said Martha.

All the Clover Bunch laughed at this until Fritz grunted sleepily.

"But do please go on, Anne," begged Marjory.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ARMY WITH BANNERS

"WHERE did he go?" cried Johnny.

"When did he go?" cried Effie.

"Ask him when he comes back for his baby-shoe," laughed Aunt Minty. "He forgot it, and I don't see how he'll ever get along without it."

Of course the Clover Bunch was talking about Fritz, who had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared again from Clover Patch.

"Well he's stayed all through January and a little way into February anyway," said Effie.

"While he's gone, let's make up stories about where he is," said Anne.

"Let's guess what he'll bring when he comes back next time," said Effie.

"Maybe, he won't come," said Johnny dismally.

It was still dark, next morning, when Johnny dressed and stumbled down stairs and out-of-doors into the soft grayness of what wasn't morning and what wasn't night. Everything was still and hushed as if the earth was standing on tiptoe waiting for something wonderful to happen. Johnny knew that the something wonderful was the coming of the sun. He stopped long enough to gaze at the long bright line of gold over the hills in the east, which looked like its path. But his head was so full of a big thought that he had found in it when he woke up, that he couldn't watch long even so wonderful a thing as a winter sunrise.

A few days before, on the top of a hill much higher than Clover Patch, Johnny and Fritz had made a fine snow-house. They had driven up this hill with Jake, Fritz sitting in the bottom of the sleigh. Jake had stopped to talk with a farmer about some timber in the woods near by. Both men had gone to look the trees over. It had taken some time. And while they were gone, Johnny and Fritz had made the snow-house.

"'Tisn't far as the crow flies," Jake had said as they drove home awhile later. Johnny had asked what this meant. Jake had explained that crows fly across lots and over woods instead of going round by roads, and so save many miles and much time.

Johnny was quite sure that Fritz had gone back to the snow-house. He wanted to go, himself, and had meant to, Saturday.

Not being a school-boy, Fritz hadn't waited for Saturday. Now Johnny was going to look for him. To save time and get back before breakfast, Johnny was going "as the crow flies." That is, he went on his snow-shoes, "across lots."

Back at Clover Patch, a little later, there was great surprise. When the breakfast bell didn't bring Johnny to the table Effie ran to look for him. She came running back, declaring there wasn't a sign of him anywhere in his room. Miss Anne hurried upstairs to look in the other rooms. Quick as she was, she found Aunt Minty there before her. Both called and looked. Aunt Minty even cast a quick glance into the maple outside the window. But there was no boy there—not even a boy's trousers. Only a clear winter sky showed behind tossing bare branches.

"Maybe he's gone to school early," said Miss Anne, as they went back to the breakfast-table. "He helps me keep the room neat. Maybe he's doing something to surprise me."

"Maybe he's gone to the post-office to mail valentines," said Effie. "He might not want us to know."

Soon after breakfast Aunt Minty went to telephone Mrs. Jake. Johnny wasn't there. Jake had gone to Morrisville and wouldn't be back till noon. But Johnny hadn't gone with him. Aunt Minty phoned the postoffice. No one had seen Johnny.

Anne went to school early. Effie stood in the window and watched to catch the first glimpse of Johnny coming back. She was too worried to go to school. In a few minutes a little boy came from Anne to say that Johnny hadn't been at the schoolhouse.

All the morning Aunt Minty and Effie waited and watched and wondered. Toward noon, when there was still no sign of Johnny, Effie slipped out of the house. She ran to the road. And there, on the same side of the road as Clover Patch, itself, away across the broad dazzling Clover meadow, was a long straggling line of snowshoe tracks.

"He's gone snowshoeing, Aunt Minty," cried Effie, a minute later, bursting into the kitchen. "I found his tracks and his snowshoes are gone from their nail in the shed."

"If he isn't back by noon, and Jake isn't," said Aunt Minty, "I shall go to look for him myself."

Once, when she was trying to get Jake in Morrisville, a girl's voice, brisk and clear, came over the wire.

"You have the wrong number," it said. "This is Dolly Miller. I'll ring off."

Aunt Minty didn't think anything about the name then. She was used to getting wrong numbers on this country line. But afterward she remembered it was the same name they had heard over the wire the night after the big storm.

Just about ten o'clock, somehow or other, Johnny stumbled across that little snow-hut high in the hills. He was almost too tired to feel disappointed that Fritz wasn't there. He was too bewildered and blinded by the sunshine on the snow to notice the wonderful white country which sparkled below him. He gave one homesick look toward the roofs of Clover Patch, far far away—a bit of red between the blue of sky and white of earth.

Then he stumbled into the little hut.

Luckily it wasn't a very cold day. And inside the hut it was really quite warm. Johnny went to sleep almost at once and slept until the noon whistles from Morrisville sounded loud and clear across the stillness.

At first he couldn't remember who he was to say nothing of where he was. He went to the opening of the hut which he and Fritz had called the door. He rubbed his eyes and stared out across the broad snowfields. He rubbed them again and stared again. He shaded them from the glare of the sun. What had so changed the landscape?

The sparkling stretch of pasture and meadow-land was the same unbroken white, except for a brown line here and there that marked a fence. But on the slope of the opposite hills, an army marched, halted,

marched again. It was a small army, but large enough to startle a boy who had never seen any but a picture-book army. The men stood stiff and straight. Rifles flashed in the sun. There was a flag—the same glorious red, white and blue that Johnny had carried only day before yesterday when he had led a Lincoln Day march at school.

Johnny stood spellbound. Even as he watched, over the crest of the hill, the army with banners disappeared. Only the snow-clad hills were left behind.

Johnny rubbed his eyes again. The army didn't come back. He waited awhile, hoping it would. But there was only sky and snow and sun. Tired and hungry and homesick, he started back toward the friendly red roofs of Clover Patch.

"I came straight as a crow flies," he exclaimed sometime later, bobbing up in the

driveway, just as Aunt Minty drove the old horse out of the yard.

"John Thomas Clover," she cried, "where did you come from?"' Then she saw how Johnny's lips quivered, how big and tired his eyes were, and how his whole little body lagged with weariness. The next minute she was out of the sleigh and her arms were around him.

And to the utter upset of John Thomas Clover, Aunt Minty cried.

"Oh Johnny," she said again, "where have you been?"

"Just to my snow-house," said Johnny. "I went to look for Fritz. But he wasn't there. Oh Aunt Minty, were you worried? I would have told you where I was going only you weren't up yet. And I expected to be right back anyway. Jake said crows went fast, and I supposed I could. I didn't

mean to make you cry—honest, Aunt Minty, I didn't."

Johnny was near crying himself.

"I'm not fit to be a mother to a boy, I guess," said Aunt Minty. "But I can't scold you this time—and that's all there is to it."

Aunt Minty led the old horse back to the barn. A very sober Johnny helped unharness. Then they went into the kitchen.

"Send Jake over just as soon as he comes, please," Effie's anxious voice was saying into the phone receiver.

"Johnny's come," cried Aunt Minty. "He's all right, only I guess he wants some dinner."

She sank down heavily in a chair, pulling off her gloves. But the next instant she sprang up again.

"Mercy," she cried. "What is in this chair?"

Out of the chair rolled a sleepy puppy. At this abrupt ending to his nap, he stretched, turned around two or three times, and curled up for another nap on Aunt Minty's feet.

"He's just come," cried Effie, as she hung up the telephone receiver. "He's all tired out—he must have walked miles. And he brought this."

Aunt Minty and Effie gazed wonderingly at a small photograph in Effie's hand. It was a kodak picture mounted on a piece of cardboard. The corners were chewed. But the likeness, itself, wasn't hurt. And softly colored, it looked up at Aunt Minty —the picture of a round, rosy baby with laughing eyes and a tangle of yellow curls.

"Bless the baby," cried Aunt Minty.

"Wouldn't I like to get my arms round him this minute!"

"And it's Valentine's Day," cried Effie. "So I shall just call him our Valentine baby. He must go down in the Fritz Book just as soon as Miss Anne gets home. Isn't he a splendid clue, Aunt Minty?"

"Where did you get him, Fritzie?" said Aunt Minty.

But Fritz was sound asleep again.

They were all at supper that night—the happiest kind of a Clover Bunch—when Johnny suddenly laid down his fork.

"I saw an army to-day," he announced.

"An army?" cried the others.

Johnny nodded.

"I went to sleep in my snow-house up at the top of the hill," he explained, "and when I woke up, there was a real army over on the hills the other side of this valley.

There was a flag too," he added, going back to his supper.

Anne smiled at Aunt Minty and Aunt Minty smiled back at Anne.

"What became of them?" asked Effie greatly excited.

"Oh, they just marched down the hill and up again," said Johnny.

"Something like the King of France and his ten thousand men," said Anne.

"But I did see them, honest, Miss Anne," said Johnny.

"Another dream, son," said Aunt Minty.

"How could he see a real army like that?" cried Martha, almost before little Anne had stopped reading the chapter.

"I can guess what it was," said Joe.

"I can guess who the Valentine baby was," said Betty. She smiled up at Anne

from the Fritz Book, where the little old picture was fastened with the clues.

"Don't you dare," warned little Anne.

"Please don't guess aloud, Betty," said Marjory at the same minute. "I don't want to know till the story tells us. But it does seem as if I can't wait. Do please every one keep still so Anne can go on reading."

CHAPTER XV

AUNT MINTY GOES AWAY

SPRING came up the hills early that year. Some warm days in March honeycombed the snow, set the brook sparkling through the ice, and started the sap in the maples.

One day a letter came from Uncle Gem asking to borrow Johnny through sugaring.

"Lucky that vacation and sugaring come together for once, isn't it, son?" said Aunt Minty smiling across the table at Johnny's eager face.

"May I really go?" cried Johnny.

"Yes," said Aunt Minty. "Gem's letter crossed mine to him, asking if he couldn't use an extra pair of hands to help him sugar

off. I'm going away, myself, on important business," Aunt Minty smiled most delightfully, but she didn't say what the business was. "Think you and Effie can manage Clover Patch, Anne? Mr. and Mrs. Jake will help, of course."

"We'll do our very best, Aunt Minty," said Anne.

Effie nodded. "But it will be dreadfully big and empty here without you and Johnny, Aunt Minty," she said.

The day Uncle Gem came for Johnny, he took Aunt Minty and her trunk to Morrisville where she took the train to the city. Clover Patch was rather big for two little people, like Anne and Effie. But Jake looked in often during the day. And every night, Mrs. Jake came. Then Fritz, who had been gone two weeks, arrived from somewhere, and helped out a little. But he

didn't bring any new clues for the Fritz Book.

"We've eight now," said Effie one night —she and Anne were having supper on a little table near the window, which didn't seem so lonesome as the big empty one— "if Johnny's red bicycle girl really counts. He's sure he's going to see her again at Uncle Gem's. Do you suppose he will?"

"I don't believe so," said Anne absently.

Since Anne had lived at Clover Patch, she had become round and rosy. But to-night, she looked tired, Effie thought. Her eyes were sorry, and her voice matched them. Effie was just ready to ask about it, when Fritz caught the Fritz Book out of her hand. He ran a little way from her, and danced about with it in his mouth, just spoiling for a frolic. Effie started after him, which was just what he wanted. Away he

dashed through dining-room and living-room, Effie close behind. He found an open door and away he went upstairs. Effie stumbled along, calling Anne to come, too. At last, through the upper hall, came the three into Aunt Minty's room. Here Fritz landed in the exact middle of the big white bed. He hid the book under the pillow and mounted guard over it.

Effie rescued it.

"It isn't hurt, except for some marks of his teeth, just as if he'd printed on it 'This is my book!' " she said. "Miss Anne whatever is the matter with you? You don't act a bit like yourself."

"Effie!" cried Anne. She sank down in Aunt Minty's chair near the window. "I'm just ashamed to let you know what a mean selfish person I am. But I am. And I don't know what to do about it."

"Indeed you're not selfish," said Effie promptly. "You couldn't be—not if you sat down and tried."

She came across the room. Fritz jumped off the bed and came, too. Both sat down on the floor as close to Anne as they could get.

"Listen, Effie," cried Anne, "and you'll see for yourself. Maybe you don't know what Aunt Minty has gone to the city for. But I do. She's gone to find a baby to adopt. I heard her tell Mrs. Jake one day that she couldn't live much longer without one in the house. She's told me, too, that since you and Johnny are so big and in school, she can't bear to look into the little room you used to have—that little room over there, isn't it?"

Effie nodded.

"Well, she's going to take a baby from a

home, or somewhere—I don't know where —but she's going to take one!"

"But aren't you glad, Miss Anne?" cried Effie. "The day Fritz came in the basket, you know, we all hoped it would be a baby. I think 'twill be lovely."

"Of course you do," said Anne. "And that's what I ought to think and would think, if I wasn't so mean and selfish. But —you see, Effie—when the new baby comes, I'll have to go. Aunt Minty won't keep me and take a baby, too. You know she won't, Effie."

"Maybe she would," said Effie.

"I wouldn't expect her to," said Anne. "But I've been so happy here. And every day, I've thought 'maybe when June comes, Aunt Minty will just let me stay.' Of course, 'twas silly—a great girl like me. But you can't think how dreadful it will

be not to have any home again. It's so lovely to be a Clover. And after June, I don't know what I'll be."

Little Anne was so distressed, Effie and Fritz both did their best to comfort her.

"You're going to stay, Miss Anne," Effie said. "I'm just about sure Aunt Minty won't let you go. You're better than all the babies in all the homes in the city.

By and by they went down-stairs. Anne looked over school papers. Effie and Fritz both went to sleep before the fire.

Effie woke with a start. Miss Anne was beside her, greatly excited.

"I can't go on feeling so cross about it," she said. "I shall just hate that new baby. And there's only one thing to do when you feel so hateful toward anyone, father used to say. Just go to work quick, and do the very nicest, hardest-to-do thing you can for

him. So I've thought it all out. I'm going to fix up the little room that was yours and Johnny's for the new baby. I've been up to look at it. The rug is just right—all pink and green. I'll re-paint the room and bring down the baby furniture from the attic. I'll make most everything pink, because pink is prettier than anything else for a boy. And Aunt Minty will take a boy. She told me she thought Johnny needed a brother."

"Oh—and prettier for a Clover, too," cried Effie. "Let's make it just as clovery as we can. I always wear pink or green, 'cause I'm a Clover, Miss Anne."

"Don't," cried Anne sharply. "Please don't talk—yet—about being a Clover. I want to forget I'm not really one. Oh dear, I feel all cross again. I'll have to plan something else. He'll need a little

go-cart. I'll buy that old one of the Cole's. Their baby is too big for it. And they want to sell it."

"It will be lovely, Miss Anne," said Effie. "There's some pretty stuff in the attic with clover-blooms in it—Aunt Minty gave it to me. Couldn't we use that somewhere?"

"I'll cover the little rocking chair with it," said Anne. "Oh I wish it was morning, so I could begin!"

The very night that Anne and Effie were planning the Clover room for the new baby, a wonderful thing happened to Johnny.

They'd had a big run of sap every day for a week. They'd all helped gather it and boil it down. They'd all had all they could eat waxed. They'd sugared off ever so many times. They'd made little cakes, round, crescent, diamond, and heart shaped. Johnny was sure he'd never had so many

good times in all his life before. He'd decided that of all times of year—Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas even—there was none quite so delightful as "sugaring." He'd tried to make Uncle Gem promise to let him help every single year. And he'd talked gravely with Uncle Gem of saving all his money and buying the "sugar bush" next to Uncle Gem's.

That day they'd taken pounds and pounds of sugar in big and little cakes to the contractor in Morrisville.

Little Gem and little Minty were having a birthday. Uncle Gem was letting them celebrate in their own way. After a long talk, they decided the very nicest thing to do would be to invite Johnny to dinner at one of the big hotels in town. It would be a new sort of birthday party. Then, as a still greater treat, at Uncle Gem's sug-

gestion, they took Johnny to a wonderful motion picture house that had just been opened.

Johnny had wanted to go ever since he had known there were such things as moving pictures. And to-night, the pictures seemed made for him. There was one set he never forgot.

They told a simple story of a little boy, a little girl, a baby, and a wonderful dog. The children themselves were wonderful actors. And they did seem to have such good times with the dog. The dog loved all of them, but the baby was her special charge. Wherever that baby went, the dog went along. She watched him when he slept. She helped him walk, walking slowly along by his side, the baby's hand slipped through her collar.

Often the baby fell down. Then the dog

waited patiently till he got up again. She played games with him. She would catch the ball he tried to throw. She would roll it carefully back to him, her tail wagging proudly, when he grasped it in his fat little hands. By and by, in the story, all three children went out to play in the woods.

The dog for some reason was shut up in the house so that she could not follow them. While the older children played, the baby wandered away, further and further up the mountain. He fell over a steep cliff. Meanwhile, the dog had broken loose and tracked the children to the woods.

Not finding the baby, she set out at once to hunt him up. She found the spot where the baby had fallen and bounded after him. Step by step, up a safe zig-zag path, the dog coaxed the baby back up the cliff. When, at the top, tired out, the little thing

fell down and couldn't be coaxed any further, the dog ran to the children. By this time, they had missed the baby and were hunting wildly for him. The dog begged them to go with her. They followed all the way to the cliff and found the baby unhurt and sound asleep. The children, themselves, were no happier than the dog. She jumped wildly about and you could almost hear her bark.

It was all so real that when the dog was shown all by herself on the screen, wagging her tail in a friendly way at the delighted audience, Johnny couldn't believe she wasn't really there. As they went out of the building he kept looking back. On the street, he caught at Uncle Gem's hand.

"Couldn't we just go back and see the dog a minute?" he said.

Uncle Gem laughed. But on the way

home he told Johnny and Gem and Minty about how the wonderful pictures are made.

"But could a dog really do all those things, Daddy?" cried little Minty.

"A dog could and did," said Uncle Ben. "There's a company of moving picture people somewhere near Morrisville now. They're taking pictures out in the country. Our hills and mountains make wonderful backgrounds. Someday, maybe, we'll go and see them."

"Maybe I won't buy the sugar bush, Uncle Gem," said Johnny. "Maybe I'll go into the moving picture business. I think Fritz could be taught tricks. I'm going to try when I get home again—that is, if he's there then. He did look a little like that moving picture dog."

"Same breed," said Uncle Gem. "Such dogs make fine trick-dogs usually. And

Fritz is a smart puppy if only he'd stay home long enough to learn anything. That breed of dogs loves children. Think how the dog in the pictures loved that baby."

"It was a really truly baby, mother," said Minty, as the children told Aunt Kate all about the wonderful birthday treat. "Just as real as our own baby is."

"And it was a really truly dog, too, Aunt Kate," added Johnny.

"Did you really think that movie-dog was right there somewhere, John?" asked Martha.

John laughed.

"I think I really did," he said. "You see, there weren't movies everywhere then. Folks didn't know so much about them, or how they were made."

"I'd like to see some made" said Martha, "wouldn't you, Martin?"

Martin nodded.

"I'm as excited as Marjory," laughed Betty. "I can't wait for the rest of the story. Go on, Anne, if you aren't tired."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BICYCLE GIRL

WHILE all these things were happening to the Clover Bunch, things were happening out-of-doors, too. The earth was wearing a green April gown. Some days, to be sure, she slipped on over it a white snow-flake apron. But when she took it off, there was the same wonderful gown, a little greener than before. The brook sparkled across her bosom like a silver chain. And in her great kind heart there were all sorts of lovely thoughts ready to spring out in flowers.

School began and Johnny came back to Clover Patch. But still Aunt Minty stayed in the city. And still her letters said, "I

haven't yet done what I came to do. I mean to stay till I do."

"She can't find just the baby she wants," Anne whispered to Effie, after reading one of these letters aloud. It was a bright Saturday morning—so warm and clear that they were all out in the garden. Jake was busy there, and Johnny had a hoe. Little green clumps showed where daffodils were coming. Crocuses lifted gold and lavender cups along the borders of the beds. You could almost smell hyacinths.

The Clover room for the new baby was all ready. Every time Anne had what she called a "cross spell," about leaving Clover Patch, she added something to it. She pounded some of her bad feeling away one day on the rug. Another day, she painted furiously, and made everything white and shining. Once, she covered the little chair

with clover-blossom chintz. One night, when she felt especially unpleasant, she walked all the way to Morrisville and bought stuff for curtains—white sprinkled with clover blossoms. She worked half the night making these. She bought the Cole's go-cart, too. It was all ready for the new baby. Now, she was making a cushion for it. She had dropped her work to read Aunt Minty's letter.

When she had finished the letter, she began hunting through her work-basket for something. Her hurrying fingers made a tangle of everything there.

Effie watched for a minute. "What are you doing, Anne?" she cried.

"I'm beginning to feel cross again," Anne said. "Think of leaving Clover Patch just when it's growing so lovely—lovelier every day. Think what it will be in June. I'm

going to embroider a 'C' on my cushion." As she spoke, she traced the letter on the cloth.

"For whatever the baby's first name may be, his last name will be Clover." She snipped off a length of rosy floss and threaded her needle with a jerk. "This is really the last thing I can think of to do for him," she added.

Whatever they said about the new baby, Effie and Anne said in whispers, or when Johnny wasn't around. They decided that the surprise Aunt Minty had planned for them all should really be one to Johnny. So, out of school, Johnny spent his time looking for Fritz, never dreaming of the things the girls were doing. Fritz had run away again, just the day before Johnny had come home.

"I want him to do tricks like the moving-

picture dog," Johnny said over and over. Of course, he'd told Anne and Effie all about the wonderful dog and baby he'd seen in Morrisville.

Just now Johnny was hoeing away with all his might. Effie gave Anne a comforting little pat, and ran away to ask Jake where would be the best place to sow her seeds. Anne went on with her "C". After a few stitches she didn't jerk the thread. The pucker went out of her forehead. She looked off toward the hazy blue hills. Then she dropped her work and drew a deep breath of joy at all the beauty and growth everywhere about her.

"Mignonette here, and bachelor buttons here?" Effie was asking anxiously.

Anne smiled, then suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Look, look, look!" she cried to the others.

"Down the hill!" For of course, at her excited words, Effie and Johnny had both looked straight at her standing there, waving a skein of rosy embroidery floss.

At her last words, they turned like the little wooden figures in toy-shops, that move on springs, and gazed down the hill toward Morrisville. There, coming as rapidly as it could, was a bicycle. Little flashes of red, as it whizzed along, turned out to be a girl wearing a red sweater and a red cap. In front of the girl something unusual about the wheel proved to be a small, high, round basket.

Afterwards, the three Clovers agreed that the reason they didn't dash straight down the driveway to the road to meet and stop that flying bicycle girl was that they were so perfectly sure she would turn into Clover Patch it didn't seem necessary.

What could Johnny's red girl on a wheel be doing on that road unless she had heard about Fritz and was coming after him? Not one of them thought she might skim straight past Clover Patch, never once glancing at its roofs and broad acres. But that was exactly what she did—the crimson of her sweater flashing back a sort of farewell through the budded lilacs.

As she whizzed along past Clover Patch, her bell buzzing shrilly, because of the turn just ahead, the three Clovers found their tongues and their legs. Screaming and running, they flew to the road. If it had kept on going, the wheel would have been out of sight before they reached the edge of the big yard. But it had stopped just at the top of the hill, so they could see it clearly against the blue sky.

The girl in red was on the ground.

Jumping wildly about her, and barking so she couldn't possibly hear anything else, was Fritz. Perhaps he had been on his way back to Clover Patch. If so, at sight of the girl, he had changed his puppy mind. He knew her, and gave her his warmest greeting. And she knew him. She gathered him, dust and all, up into her arms. She cradled him, barking and kicking, just like a baby for a brief minute. Then she dropped him into the basket on the front of her wheel. It was so high and small he couldn't get out. Still barking, he whizzed away with the girl and the wheel over the brow of the hill.

"Well, that's the end of my dog," said Johnny gloomily. "She's got him, and I suppose she's going to keep him."

"I suppose he is hers—really," said Effie gently.

"But you really did see her, Johnny-boy," said Anne. She slipped an arm around Johnny's disconsolate little figure. "It wasn't a dream."

"I always knew that wasn't no—wasn't any—dream, Miss Anne," said Johnny. "I knew I saw her."

The three Clovers were coming slowly back the road toward Clover Patch. Anne still held a needle threaded with rosy floss. Effie had a paper of bachelor-button seed, some of which sifted to the road-side. Johnny dragged his hoe.

It was Effie who first saw the station-wagon from Morrisville coming up the hill toward them.

"Aunt Minty's come!" she cried. And away she flew down the hill, Johnny and Anne close behind. A minute or two later Anne felt Aunt Minty's arms around her.

"Oh, but I'm glad to get home," she cried. "After I wrote that last letter, I was so homesick, I packed right up and came."

"She hasn't brought any baby," whispered Effie hurriedly to Anne, as the last bundle came out of the wagon.

"Perhaps she couldn't find just the one she wanted," whispered Anne, just as Johnny's excited voice broke in.

"It was the red bicycle girl, Aunt Minty. She just went by here and she has Fritz. So I did see her that time at Uncle Gem's after all," he added triumphantly.

"We all saw her just now," said Anne. She was helping Aunt Minty carry her bundles into the house. Once inside, she bustled about helping take off and put away wraps.

There was so much talk all that day about

Fritz and the bicycle girl, and what this meant and what that meant and what the other meant, and what would happen next, that other things were crowded out. Anne wrote down all about the red bicycle girl in the Fritz Book. And the Clover Detective Force decided then and there to try harder than ever to find out whether or not Fritz belonged to her.

But that night, after Anne had gone to her room, and Effie and Johnny were asleep, and Aunt Minty had gone to her room, there came a soft knock on her door.

"Come in," said Aunt Minty. She knew it was a Clover knock.

Anne came in. She wore the soft, new, rose-colored kimono that Aunt Minty had brought her from the city. In one hand was a key.

"Here is the key to the little room," she said. "I kept it so Johnny wouldn't get in. And I just remembered to bring it to you."

"I hadn't noticed it was locked, Anne," said Aunt Minty. "But why on earth should it be?"

"It's all ready, Aunt Minty, for the new baby—when you find him," said Anne slowly.

"The new baby?" cried Aunt Minty.

Meanwhile, Anne had unlocked the door of the little room.

"Come and see, Aunt Minty," she said softly.

Aunt Minty brought the lamp and went past Anne into the little room. There it was, dainty and fresh, the curtains swaying lightly in the night breeze, the little bed turned down all ready, the cushioned chair waiting.

"How pretty," cried Aunt Minty, "did you do it, Anne?"

"Effie and I," said Anne. "For the baby you went to get."

Then sitting on the edge of the new baby's bed, Anne told Aunt Minty she'd known all the time what her trip to the city had been for—how she just couldn't help knowing—and how she and Effie had talked and planned and made everything ready. She didn't say anything about her own part—how she dreaded to leave Clover Patch.

Aunt Minty patted Anne's back gently.

"I shall love to come into this little room," she said, "and think over my Clovers when they were babies—and of how you did it all for me and a new baby. I do love babies, little Anne. But I didn't go to the city to adopt one. You were mistaken al-

together about that. My business there had nothing to do with babies."

Somehow, Anne wasn't all sorry and she wasn't all glad. She reached up for Aunt Minty's kiss.

"Dear Aunt Minty," was all she could say.

"Run away to bed, now," said Aunt Minty. She kissed her again. And somehow, down deep in her heart somewhere, Anne knew that Aunt Minty understood all she hadn't said.

Anne slipped away. Aunt Minty put out the light.

"Aunt Minty," came Anne's voice again at the open door. It was half wistful, half gay.

"What shall we do with the Cole baby's old go-cart?" she cried. "It's all made over new and it's ready down in the back

entry. It has a new pillow. And there's a rosy 'C' on it for the new Clover baby."

When this chapter was finished, Aunt Minty smiled her beamiest smile at little Anne. Little Anne smiled back in her happiest fashion. It was easy to be seen that these two understood each other.

"I know just how you felt about leaving Clover Patch," said Lissy. "Why, I couldn't leave the Penny Bank for good and all. I just couldn't. It makes me homesick this minute to think of it."

"Don't think about it then, Lissy," said Roger.

"And I know just how you felt about the babies, Aunt Minty," cried Nancy Spindle. It isn't like living at all unless there are babies around."

CHAPTER XVII

AN INDIAN VILLAGE

ON the morning of Arbor Day, school closed early. Aunt Minty packed a big basket with all sorts of good things to eat. Wtih it, the Clover Bunch all crowded into the old buggy, and drove by roundabout, woodsy roads to an old orchard up in the hills.

"Does this big blossomy place belong to you, too, Aunt Minty?" cried Anne. She sank down in the grass and looked up into the roof of rosy blossoms thick with bees over her head.

"I lived here when I was a little girl," said Aunt Minty. "That's why it looks so

good to me, I suppose. The old house stood over there under that big apple-tree."

"I never saw so beautiful a place anywhere outside of England," said Anne. "It's so big and woodsy it makes me think of home."

Aunt Minty smiled at her. She didn't say anything.

That was the loveliest morning, all made out of sunshine, apple-blooms and bird-songs, and spangled with dewdrops. Effie and Johnny wandered about and waded in the brook. Aunt Minty and Anne sat under the trees and visited, dreamed, and drank in warmth and color and fragrances and song till they both felt all made over, somehow.

By and by, Aunt Minty spread out a white table-cloth on the grass, set out all the good things from the big basket, and the

lunch began. They were just in the midst of it, talking and laughing all at once, when Effie put up her hand and said softly:

"Look—oh everybody—look quick!"

When they had come into that story-book place, they had all felt that wonderful impossible things had happened there and might begin to happen again at any radiant minute. And here was one right under their very eyes. Toddling along a little winding path, which came from the woods, was the most adorable, yellow-headed baby. He had on a white romper, rumpled and torn and soiled with woods earth, white half-hose, and blue strapped booties.

"The darling," cried Aunt Minty springing to her feet.

"Isn't it the Valentine baby?" whispered Effie to Anne.

Aunt Minty was already half way to the

baby. He had seen the strange faces and was just getting a cry ready. But one look into Aunt Minty's sweet motherly face changed his mind. He held out his hands and went straight into her open arms.

"Uck-y," he said, putting his head down on her shoulder.

Anne and Effie and Johnny were all as near as possible to the lovely lost baby when something else happened. A big, handsome bull-terrier, harnessed to a little four-wheeled cart, came bounding along the path from the woods. She walked straight to Aunt Minty's side.

"Woof?" she said anxiously.

At the sound of the dog's voice, the baby turned to her. When Aunt Minty set him down on the ground, he put both arms around the dog's neck. The dog's eyes fairly pleaded with Aunt Minty. She did

so want to be understood. In her best fashion, she said,

"This baby belongs to me. Please help me take him back where he belongs."

"You wonderful dog," cried Aunt Minty. "You want us to help you, don't you?"

She lifted the baby into the little cart.

"What next?" she said.

Carefully the dog turned the cart around. Then she set off along the path toward the woods. It was plain she knew where she was going. And along with her went Aunt Minty, Anne, Effie and Johnny.

"If she wasn't so big and dignified," said Effie, "she'd look like Fritzie."

"She looks like the moving picture dog," Johnny said, "but the moving picture baby was smaller than this one."

"Babies grow," said Anne thoughtfully.

"I think the baby looks like the Valentine baby," said Effie.

It was all exciting and unusual. The dog kept on slowly, because the path was rough and uneven, dipping into little hollows and climbing little hills. The baby sat quietly, dipping and rising with the cart as if he was quite used to this kind of travel. He cooed "Uck-y," and "Ke-o." It was plain that one of these words was his name and the other the dog's. But which was which no one but the baby and the dog knew.

They left the orchard for the woods. In a rough spot, the baby would have rolled out of the cart, if Johnny hadn't caught and righted him.

Probably he had fallen out there coming the other way. And as there had been no way of getting him back in, he had run away and the dog had followed him.

On and on through the woods, the dog led the way. Anne and Effie kept close to him, on one side, and Johnny and Aunt Minty on the other. In one hand Aunt Minty still held an empty olive bottle. But no one noticed that.

"I remember these woods well," she said, as excited with their adventures as the other Clovers. "This road comes out soon in a cleared place shut in by hills. Brother Gem and I used to come over here to play. We built a playhouse once, I remember."

Already the woods were growing thinner. In a minute, they saw the cleared space. But it wasn't just cleared space any more. As they came into it, they found it was the prettiest, completest little Indian village. There were tepees, with blazing fires before them. There were squaws and papooses. Down the streets, were Indian braves with

bows, arrows, and tomahawks. One, who stood tall and straight among them, was evidently some great chief. And straight into the midst of all this, that lovely May noon, walked the dog dragging the cart and baby, Aunt Minty with her olive bottle, Anne, Effie, and Johnny.

A man on a rise of ground not far away made frantic gestures. But the dog didn't stop, of course. And where the dog and baby went there, too—even into an Indian village—went the excited Clover Bunch.

They stepped bravely along between the tepees. None of the squaws paid the least attention to them, but went on with what they were doing, whatever it was. Could this lovely, fair haired, pink and white baby belong there?

After a minute, one of the Indian braves said something to the chief. He looked at

"In the midst of his fierce war-paint, the man's eyes twinkled."

the man on the hill. Then he looked at the advancing Clover Bunch.

In the glory of his blanket, war-paint, and feathers, he came toward Aunt Minty.

"Cleo," he said to the dog, "take Lucky to the woods."

The dog turned at once and drew the cart away toward the woods.

"You aren't a real Indian after all," cried Johnny in great disgust.

"May I ask," said Aunt Minty severely for her, one eye on the disappearing baby, "who you *are?* And what you are all doing here in my woods ?"

In the midst of his fierce war-paint, the man's eyes twinkled.

"May I ask," he said, "who you are, madam, and what you are doing here in the midst of my picture?"

"Picture?" cried all the Clovers looking

about, and seeing for the first that the Indian village didn't look exactly real after all.

"And of course it couldn't be," murmured Effie to Anne, "right here where Aunt Minty used to play."

"Are you the moving picture people?" cried Johnny, greatly excited and asking questions so fast there was no use trying to answer them. "Are we in a real live moving picture? Will we be on a screen in Morrisville? Can we go, sometime, and see ourselves? Was it your dog I saw in the pictures there? Can I teach my dog to do tricks like her?"

The man laughed at Johnny standing straight and eager before him.

"One at a time, one at a time," he said good-naturedly. "You're surely in our picture now, but I don't think we'll put you

on the screen. Not that you wouldn't make an interesting scene," he added. Then he turned to Aunt Minty. "I'm sorry about the woods, madam. I supposed they belonged to the land over there." He waved his hand toward the hills the other side of the little hollow in which the Indian Village had been set up. "Really though, we haven't hurt them any."

"But we have hurt your picture," said Aunt Minty, with quick good-natured understanding. "We must look a little out-of-place in an Indian village. I'm sorry. We'll leave you just as soon as you tell us something about that blessed baby over there."

"That's David Cary," said the man. "We movie people call him Lucky. His father was killed in a railway accident, and his little mother became a member of our

company. She died last winter, and left her baby to us. We all take care of him—I can assure you he's a great favorite. He's had parts ever since he was a tiny baby—your boy probably did see him in the pictures at Morrisville, and Cleo, the dog, too." He smiled at Johnny's eager face.

"In this picture, Cleo rescues Lucky from these Indians. She's a wonder—Cleo is. While they wait for their parts, she usually takes care of the baby. I suppose he tumbled out of his cart this morning and ran off and she ran after him. Lucky's getting too big to stay where we put him now. Really he needs better care than we can give him, much as we love him. You don't know of a home around here—a good one—where we could put him and feel safe about him? His mother left him in my charge and I'd like to place him in a good home."

"I don't know of any just now," said Aunt Minty.

"We adopt babies sometimes at Clover Patch," said Johnny. "But we really need a dog more. You wouldn't want to sell your dog, would you?"

"Cleo?" said the man. "Cleo's mine as long as she's anybody's. She doesn't mind being part of a moving picture company. In fact, she doesn't know any other kind of life. But Lucky's different. He needs a real home and a real mother."

Aunt Minty glanced wistfully toward the child who had come back, Cleo close behind him. One of the squaws was playing with him.

"Are you Miss Araminta Clover?" asked the man suddenly.

Aunt Minty nodded.

"Is your place called Clover Patch?"

All the Clovers nodded this time, waiting anxiously for the man's next words.

"You haven't seen a stray puppy there, have you?"

"Oh, you're the voice over the phone," cried Effie. "We have put you down in our Fritz Book. Do you know anything about Fritz?"

"Is my dog yours?"cried Johnny at the same minute.

"Fritz isn't really ours," said the man. "But he seems to think he is. He's Cleo's puppy. We sold him, last fall, to a lady in New York. She gave him to a Miss Dolly Miller, who lives at Lakeside, somewhere in this part of the country. But Fritz won't stay in his home—or anywhere else long. Every little while, he shows up here, just as much at home as Cleo. He loves Lucky. And the baby loves him al-

most as much as he does Cleo. They have great frolics together, the old dog looking on to see that no harm comes to the baby. Then just as suddenly as Fritz came, he's gone—and no one knows when he went or where, or anything about it."

The tall Indian stooped to pick up Lucky who had run down the street between the tepees to him. The little fellow put both arms around the chief's neck and smiled sleepily at the Clovers.

"The darling," cried Aunt Minty. "He ought to have his nap this minute. You're quite right, this isn't the kind of life for him at all. I do hope you'll find a good home for him—and soon. Well, children, we'll go. We're sorry about your picture, Mr. ——"

"Story," said the Indian chief. "Sam Story. I'm rather glad you did walk into

my picture, Miss Clover. Think you couldn't change your mind and take little David?"

Aunt Minty shook her head.

"Three Clovers make quite a bunch," she said.

"But isn't that your name, Anne?" cried Lissy. "Aren't you Anne Story?"

"And isn't the baby Sam Story Jr.?" said Betty.

"You married him," cried Marjory.

"That Indian chief," said Martha in surprise.

Anne laughed merrily.

"But he wasn't an Indian chief outside the picture, you know," she said. "He's quite the nicest man I know. If you'll all stay till Saturday night, you can judge for yourselves. He's coming to take me and the babies home with him."

"Does he still make moving pictures?" asked Martin.

"Oh no," said Anne. "We live on a great fruit farm in the center of the state."

"Perhaps Fritz would have his next house party there, and invite all of us," suggested Betty, showing both her dimples.

"I wish he would," said Anne eagerly. "It's the loveliest place in the world, or it would be if it wasn't for Clover Patch. I never can decide which I love best. So I go back and forth. You must all come and tell me what you think about it," she added.

"We will," said Joe. "I'm going to have a car of my own soon, and we'll just run down."

"Please go on with the story," begged Marjory.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FOUR LEAF CLOVER

LATE that afternoon, when the Clovers reached home, they found a small brown and white puppy waiting eagerly for them. In his mouth was a letter the carrier had brought. Fritz offered it politely to Aunt Minty.

Since she came back from the city, Aunt Minty had received several of these big important-looking letters. As soon as she read this one, she went to her desk to answer it.

Anne sat down on the porch. Johnny and Fritz went to the garden. Johnny sat down on the bench and strange things happened somewhere inside of him—in his

heart, or his head, or both. By and by he jumped up, dragged Fritz out of Effie's new bachelor-buttons, where he was taking a nap, and took him to the barn. Here he tied him up.

"You'll stay mine till to-morrow morning, anyway," he said.

Effie went to the telephone. Quite as if she was grown up, she hunted through the telephone book. She gave a number and talked to somebody, asking several questions. Then she went upstairs, wrote a letter, addressed it to "Miss Dolly Miller, Lakeside," and ran all the way to the post-office with it that it might go that night. She took the one Aunt Minty had been writing, too.

That night, when Johnny went to bed, he asked Aunt Minty about where Mr. Sam Story had said the moving picture people

stayed when they weren't out making pictures.

"They've a sort of little colony, or village, near Morrisville," said Aunt Minty. "Their address is in the telephone book. And Johnny-boy, Anne and I think it was a moving picture army you saw last winter from your snow-house."

"It looked so real," said Johnny wonderingly. "But, so did that Indian village at first. I'd like to be in the moving pictures, wouldn't you, Aunt Minty?"

Aunt Minty didn't think she would.

Next morning, at the breakfast table, Johnny said, "I'm going away awhile this morning, Aunt Minty. Now, please don't think I'm lost—'cause I'm not."

"Where to, Johnny-boy?" said Aunt Minty. Aunt Minty's eyes were so twinkly and bright this morning that even Johnny

noticed them, and wondered what nice thing was going to happen. But they didn't really seem to see him, though she looked straight at him.

He mumbled an answer into his napkin as he left the table. But no one asked him any more questions. The truth was, every one was so full of her own plans that she couldn't think much about anybody else's.

"I'm going to Morrisville," said Aunt Minty after Johnny had left the room. "Want to go, Effie? I can take one of you."

"No, thank you," said Effie, adding importantly, "I've some business to attend to, Aunt Minty."

"You, little Anne?"

Anne shook her head, smiling a little wistfully.

"I'm busy, too," she said.

"What a busy Clover Bunch!" laughed Aunt Minty as she hurried upstairs.

If the sun watched that morning, he must have had some extra smiles to see the strange things that happened at Clover Patch.

First, while Aunt Minty and Effie were busy upstairs, down the hill toward Morrisville went little Anne. She trundled a go-cart. In it was a little cushion marked with a rosy "C."

An hour later, Aunt Minty drove down the same hill.

When she was safely out of the way, Johnny slid out of the barn. In both hands he clutched one end of a long rope. At the other end of the rope was an unwilling brown and white puppy. Johnny pulled one way, Fritz pulled the other. But somehow, both pulling and jumping, down the long hill they went.

After every one else had gone, down that same hill went Effie. She carried the Fritz Book and a pocket-book.

The sun was interested. These people were all going his way. So he kept them in sight. By and by, shining into Mr. Sam Story's office, just outside Morrisville, he saw enter a red-faced young woman with a go-cart.

"Please," said Anne breathlessly to Mr. Sam Story, "I've come for David."

Then, because every one did tell him things, Anne told Mr. Sam Story all about things at Clover Patch—how she hadn't any home really, and was just staying there; how she knew Aunt Minty dreadfully wanted to adopt a baby, but felt she couldn't. "You heard her say that three Clovers made quite a bunch," Anne reminded Mr. Sam Story. "But that baby ought to have a

home, and Clover Patch ought to have a baby."

Then Anne told Mr. Sam Story all about the Clover room and something about how it came to be made.

"As for me," she went on, "I can get along. I'm quite grown up."

She finished as quickly as she could, for Mr. Sam Story seemed to understand just how little and all-alone-by-herself she felt, how near June was, and everything else.

But before he could say anything, into the office came Aunt Minty, herself, bright-eyed and bustling.

"I've come to take that baby," she said in her brisk, business-like manner. "I can't bear to think of his needing just the home and care I can give him. Besides, I've such a habit of adopting babies now—"

She stopped short at sight of Anne.

"I've come for him, too," said Anne. "I know you wanted him. And I've brought his go-cart."

Mr. Sam Story telephoned to some one he called "Jeff" to bring little David Cary over to the office. Out of the corner of one eye, Mr. Sam Story saw Aunt Minty's arm go around little Anne as if it meant to stay there, or at least stay near enough to get there if Anne needed an arm to help her.

He'd just hung up the receiver, when outside the door, there was a yelp and a whine. Then into the room bounded Fritz, dragging Johnny behind him.

"Oh please, Mr. Sam Story," cried Johnny, with what breath he had left, "do take him and keep him. He's yours—or anyway, he isn't mine, I suppose. It's been dreadful getting him to come. Do please keep him or send him where he belongs.

Because, if he keeps coming to me, maybe —I can't—keep on—giving him up!"

Johnny's voice sounded as if he couldn't say much more just then.

"Johnny-boy," cried Aunt Minty. Her voice made Johnny happy all the way through. He was so glad he'd decided, hard as it had been, to give up Fritz. He sat down in a chair beside Aunt Minty. Fritz climbed up in his lap.

Then into the office came Effie.

"I saw you start off with Fritz, Johnny," she said. "And I couldn't think where you were going. But what did you come for, Aunt Minty? And Anne? I've come to buy Fritz, if Miss Dolly Miller will sell him. I've written to her. I've money I earned picking raspberries."

"Miss Dolly will be here soon," said Mr. Sam Story. "I 'phoned her this morning I

had news of Fritz. She really owns him you see. Here she is, now."

When Miss Dolly Miller came into the dingy little office somehow she seemed to fill it with life and color. At sight of her, Fritz jumped to the floor, walked up, and offered her his paw.

"You blessed puppy," cried the girl. "You do remember to shake hands, don't you. Where have you been, old runaway?"

She dropped down on the floor to shake hands with Fritz. Then Mr. Sam Story introduced her to the Clover Bunch. As she went from one to another, Fritz went along, too.

Of course it took some time for every one to tell all he knew about Fritz and his wanderings. Dolly Miller, who was, of course, Johnny's bicycle girl, began:

The summer before, visiting her aunt in

New York, they had seen some unusual moving pictures of a dog and a baby. They had been so interested in the dog that they had found out all they could about her. They traced her to the moving pictures near New York, of which Mr. Sam Story was manager. When they found that Cleo had a puppy, named Fritz, Dolly's aunt had bought him for Dolly. Dolly's cousin Fred had brought her to her own home, in Lakeside, not far from Morrisville, in his car.

"I wanted to drive the car," laughed Dolly, "so we stowed Fritz, basket and all, away in the back. I didn't do very well at driving. The car went bumpity-bumping in the road and out of it. I was so interested I forgot all about Fritz until we were almost home. When we couldn't find him anywhere, Fred turned around, and

we went back for miles. We couldn't find a trace of him anywhere. He was a valuable dog and Fred thought perhaps some one had stolen him out of the car at Morrisville, where we stopped a few minutes."

"He must have bounded out of your car into my lilacs," said Aunt Minty.

"With his rattle," said Effie. "That and the basket were the first clues for our Fritz Book."

"That rattle?" chuckled Mr. Sam Story. "That was Lucky's. Fritz was so attached to it, that when he went away from us with Miss Dolly, we let it go, too."

"I never found out anything about Fritz," went on Dolly, "till Thanksgiving Day. I went to Keen to meet some cousins who didn't come. And there in the station, all alone, as if he was waiting for the train,

sat Fritz. I carried him home in a basket on my wheel."

"I saw you," cried Johnny, "from Uncle Gem Clover's roof."

"The girl on the wheel," murmured Effie.

"He stayed with me till about Christmas time," said Dolly. "Then away he went again."

"That time, he showed up here," said Mr. Sam Story. "Though how he knew we'd come up here from New York, only he knows. Of course we'd known that Miss Dolly had lost him, and then found him, but before we could get him back to her, this time, he'd vanished, taking one of Lucky's new shoes with him."

"The baby's shoe," whispered Effie to Anne, who nodded.

"I tried to 'phone Miss Dolly," said Mr.

Sam Story, "but there was a big storm, the wires were crossed—and—"

"The man's voice over the 'phone," said Effie. "But how did we happen to hear it?"

"I tried to get Clover Patch too, you see," explained Mr. Story. "I'd heard of a lost or found puppy there."

"What a darling baby," cried Dolly, as the door opened, and a tall young man came in, carrying Lucky.

Dolly reached eagerly for the baby. Fritz capered about her, then stood on his hind feet and reached his paws up toward David Cary. David was wild with joy at sight of the puppy.

"Fit-zie, Fitzie!" he cooed.

"Please," begged Anne, "oh please, everybody, do let me take him."

She took David Cary in her arms. He

pulled off her hat and reached for her curls. She carried him to Aunt Minty.

"I must be the one to give him to you," she said, setting the laughing David in Aunt Minty's waiting arms. "Now I've made everything just as right as I can," she told herself.

"We'll attend to the business of adoption a little later," said Aunt Minty to Mr. Sam Story. "I want him to be David Cary Clover—my very own child."

"He is Lucky all right, Miss Clover," said Mr. Story, "to find such a home and such a mother. Now, let's all go out somewhere and have the best lunch we can find to celebrate."

On the way to the hotel, Dolly, Johnny, Anne, and Effie had a long talk.

"I can't sell him to you, Effie," Dolly said anxiously. "Because Aunt Dorothy

would be hurt. She'd searched the longest time to find just the right puppy for me. And Fritz is a dear, if he does run away. But let's make a bargain. When he comes to me, he's mine, and I'll keep him as long as he'll stay. And when he comes to Clover Patch, he's yours, Johnny, and you keep him."

When they sat down at the table in the dining-room, before they could think at all about what they'd like for lunch, Effie took out the Fritz Book, Anne wrote down the agreement, Dolly signed it, and each member of the Clover Detective Force signed it, too.

That was a wonderful lunch. There was so much to eat and so much to talk about, that it was nearly two o'clock when they had finished. At the office, of Mr. Sam Story, they found a very anxious Fritz wait-

ing for them. He rode away in the basket in front of Dolly on the bicycle. He seemed pleased with the arrangement that had been made for him. His head bobbed up and down over the edge of the basket like some new kind of Jack in the Box. To the last his bright eyes were fixed. upon Lucky.

"He'll come to Clover Patch," said Mr. Sam Story. "And if anything on earth can keep him there, it will be Lucky. But I don't think anything can keep him from roving. Fritz ought to join a circus."

Lucky rode to his new home in Anne's lap. Aunt Minty drove. Effie sat between them. Johnny perched behind and dragged the go-cart by the rope that had brought Fritz to Clover Patch in the morning.

"Wouldn't we make a splendid moving picture?" he exclaimed.

Some hours later, when the new Clover was being put to bed in the Clover room, Effie made one of her happy discoveries.

"Why, he's Lucky Clover," she cried.

This gave Aunt Minty just the chance she'd been waiting for.

"That's what the fourth clover leaf always is," she said. Her words and something in her voice and her smile brought Anne, breathless and questioning, to her side.

"The—fourth—clover—leaf?" she cried. "What do you mean, Aunt Minty? There'll be only three after I'm gone."

"You're not going, little Anne," said Aunt Minty. "Oh, did you think I could let you go now, after I've once had you? I found out I couldn't do that, last spring. So I went to the city to find out about you."

"About me?" cried little Anne.

"About you," said Aunt Minty. "I found those cousins of yours. They told me all they knew. I wanted to be sure if I took you some one with a better right wouldn't come along and take you away. It's taken some time to get all the legal points looked up and straightened out. But it's all done now. A letter, yesterday, made everything all right. You're to be Anne Clover of Clover Patch just as long as you want to be. And you're to give up school teaching when this term ends and help me bring up David and all the other babies I may see fit to take."

Anne couldn't say a word. Two great bright tears ran down her cheeks. Aunt Minty reached over and held her close for a minute. Effie and Johnny crowded about them. David waved his fists.

"Uck-y Ko-ver," he crowed.

CHAPTER XIX

FRITZ HOLDS A RECEPTION

LITTLE Anne stopped reading.

"Please go on," begged Marjory.

"That's all," said Anne.

"But—but what became of everybody?" cried Martha.

"Why, we're all here, aren't we?" laughed little Anne. "All the Clover Bunch—and two little Story babies besides?"

"But what happened next?" cried Marjory. "Do, please, Anne, tell us everything about everybody."

"Well," said Anne, "there isn't much to tell. You know I married Sam Story—"

"How did you happen to?" said Martha.

"Because he wanted me to, and I wanted

to," said Anne. "But that's quite a long story all by itself—"

"Oh do please write it, Anne, for us," said Betty.

"What became of Fritz?" said Roger. "Did he stay with Dolly?"

"Not long at a time," said Anne. "He came often to Clover Patch. But as long as Dolly lived at Lakeside, he went back and forth, and we don't know, of course, how many other places he called home. Next spring Dolly went away from Lakeside for good. She lives with her aunt now. She left Fritz with us, but he didn't stay long. He ran away and was gone so long we gave him up. Once we heard that there was a dog something like him in a circus in Morrisville. After that, Effie, Johnny, and I always went to circuses hoping to see him. But we never did. After

a long, long time, he began coming to Clover Patch again, now and then. Once Uncle Ben Baker saw him here and told us he was Joe's dog and lots of things about him and about Joe and Betty and Nancy and the Marties."

"Wasn't it just splendid of Fritz to bring us all together for this house party?" said Lissy, hugging Fritz.

"And the very best part of this house party, lovely as it all has been, is Anne's story," said Betty.

"Do you like it, really?" said Anne anxiously.

She asked them all, but her blue eyes looked straight at Aunt Minty.

Such a shout of approval went up that she couldn't hear what Aunt Minty said. But her smile was enough.

When they had talked over Anne's story

from beginning to end, and had wondered this, that, and the other, Nancy Spindle suddenly cried,

"Everybody listen—just a minute. The wind's stopped blowing."

Sure enough, it had grown strangely still out-of-doors. And when they all flocked to the window there were the stars twinkling down at them.

"It's still inside, too," laughed Aunt Minty. "See, children, the old clock is so amazed to see you up at this time, that it's stopped."

"Isn't it funny," said Marjory on their way up-stairs, "not to know what time we're going to bed?"

Next morning, the house party awoke to find the whitest of worlds shining under the bluest of skies. As soon as breakfast was over, the boys went out to help Jake break

out the roads. Two big horses were hitched to a great black soap kettle. The children had never seen anything like that kettle. And Aunt Minty said it had lived in her family long before she could remember. It made a first-rate snow-plough. Other farmers turned out too with horses and good-natured voices. And about noon, down the snowy road between great drifts, came a big sleigh piled high with robes. In it were Susy's father and Uncle Ben Baker.

Every one had a good hot dinner. Then, bundled till Martha couldn't be told from Marjory, except that she made much the bigger bundle, the house party was loaded into the sleigh. All the Clovers from Aunt Minty to little Sam Story, Jr., were invited by Joe and Betty and Marjory to come to New York for a visit the very first chance

they could find. Then the good-byes were said. And the procession started. First went Jake with the Clover horses to make a better track. Then came the big sleigh full of little folks, with Uncle Ben driving. Then came Molly and her little red cutter with Susy's father driving. And on the seat, stiff and straight as a drum-major, his tail thumping like a baton, sat Fritz.

"Jingle-jangle," cried the big bells on the big sleigh to the little bells behind on the little red cutter. And "Jingle jingle-jing," laughed back the little chimes gaily.

"But I can't see," said Nancy Spindle as they tunneled along through the great drifts, "how we ever got to Clover Patch that night."

"You found a cross-cut across the fields," said Uncle Ben. "In summer there is sort

of a road there, and probably Fritz, or Molly, or both, knew about it."

"I'll never forget how Betty disappeared in the snow-storm that day," said Joe.

"She looked exactly as if she was flying," said Lissy.

"I felt as if I was," laughed Betty. "And I'll never forget how good that light from Clover Patch looked coming nearer and nearer through the snow."

"Hasn't it been wonderful?" cried Marjory.

Glenmore and the The Willows proved to be a long way off by the regular road. And the big sleigh and the little red cutter had to go very slowly and carefully. Once there was so much snow in the road Susy's father had to get out and hold up the big sleigh on one side while it went round a corner. Once every one had to get out and

walk for a short distance on snowshoes. Even during this Fritz rode in the cutter, tipping perilously, but balancing somehow, and barking madly all the while.

The short afternoon was almost gone, when at last, "right side up with care," as Joe said, the house party jingle-jangled into the yard of The Willows. Grandma Beach quite forgot to be dignified as she welcomed her family back again. As for Granny, she hugged every one twice over, even Joe to whose shoulder she didn't quite reach. Aunt Eunice smiled and nodded her head, then shook it slightly as she regretted over and over that a storm should have seen fit to come in the very middle of her little grand-nieces' visit. And Celia helped every one unwrap and get warm and ready for the good supper she was preparing.

All but Susy—she had to go on with her

father and Molly. The Ben Baker Bunch was to stay all night at The Willows. At the very last minute, Fritz scampered off after the red cutter and its jingling bells.

"I'm sorry to lose so much time here with the Grandmas," said Marjory, as she and Lissy went sleepily to bed in the very early evening. "But I shall always be glad Fritz took us to Clover Patch."

"Wasn't it funny that he should take it into his head to go home with Susy?" said Lissy. "Isn't he the funniest dog that ever lived anyway?"

"He loves Molly," said Marjory. "Oh Lissy, were you ever so sleepy in all your life before? I don't believe I'll ever wake up in the morning. And day after to-morrow we go home."

It was almost noon next day when Marjory and Lissy came down-stairs.

They found the Ben Baker Bunch all there except Martha, who was still sound asleep. And Fritz had returned from Susy's. And Susy had just 'phoned to know if he'd come all right.

"She said he just loved the baby," said Betty, "and the baby loved him."

Just here the telephone jingled again. This time it was Mr. Brooke in New York. He had just received a letter from Grandma Beach telling how the storm had broken up the children's visit with them. And he said they might stay over until Monday. And even while Marjory and Lissy clapped their hands over the prospect of three more whole days at The Willows, Betty and Joe and Nancy Spindle and Martin and Fritz decided they'd stay, too.

"Three whole days," Marjory said over and over. And to look forward to them

they looked delightfully long. But they were packed so full of good times, both indoors and outdoors, that almost at once, there were two whole days, then "only one day more."

"And it seems just a minute since we started," said Marjory, when they all found their places in the chair-car on the long train that stopped at Glenmore just long enough to pick them up.

It was a very gloomy Fritz that Joe led away to his place in the baggage-car. And when Joe came back, he looked almost as unhappy.

"I'll have to stay with him," he said. "He acts so, no one will bother with him. He always does when he has to ride in the baggage-car. I say, one of you come along, too."

Somehow, Betty thought Joe would want

her. And somehow, Nancy Spindle thought Joe would want *her.* Marjory was sure she was the one to go. And if she went, Roger must go and Lissy, too. But Martin felt it was his duty to help Joe out, and where Martin went, his Twin went. So, it happened that the porter, coming up the aisle, saw the whole bunch suddenly come to its feet, quite as if moved by springs, all crying,

I'll go!" and "I'll go, too!"

Perhaps because Joe's father and Marjory's father both had something quite important to do with this very railroad, perhaps the size of the bill Joe had in his hand, perhaps because it was much easier to go along with such an eager crowd of little folks than it was to head it off, influenced the porter. Anyhow, he said something to the conductor, who glanced them over and

smiled. Then, grinning broadly, the porter took the whole laughing chattering crowd down the aisles of the coaches till they came to the baggage-car where a justly indignant Fritz kept two trainmen busy trying to hold him.

Around Fritz they all gathered. And Fritz was the happiest dog that ever was. It was quite like a reception to which many of his friends had come. He sat up, he shook hands with them, he gave quick, glad, little barks of welcome and delight.

"I never saw anything like it," said one of the trainmen looking on. "That dog's almost human. He ought to have a write-up in a paper."

"He's going to be in a book," said Marjory proudly.

"Isn't it lovely," cried Betty, "that Anne's story has told us so much about him when he was a puppy?"

"Wasn't it the best story?" cried Nancy.

"There's just one thing," said Marjory.

"What?" cried every one except Fritz, who cocked his head to listen.

"I do so want to know about the between-times," said Marjory.

"The between-times?" said Martha.

"Yes," said Marjory. She turned to the dog. "What did you do, Fritzie, after you left Clover Patch before you joined the circus, and how did you come to join the circus?"

"As I remember it, Mar," said Joe, "one of the men found Fritz running along the road not far from the tents and just brought him in."

"But where was he running from and where was he running to?" cried Marjory.

"Ask Fritz," laughed Joe.

Fritz rolled his bright eyes gravely from one to another of them.

"That's my secret," he said, as plainly as a dog could.

THE END

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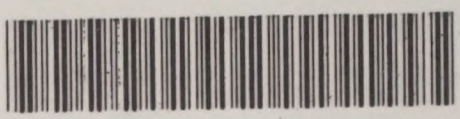

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